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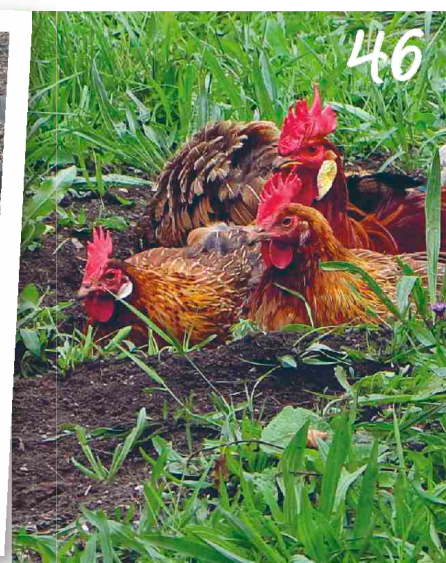
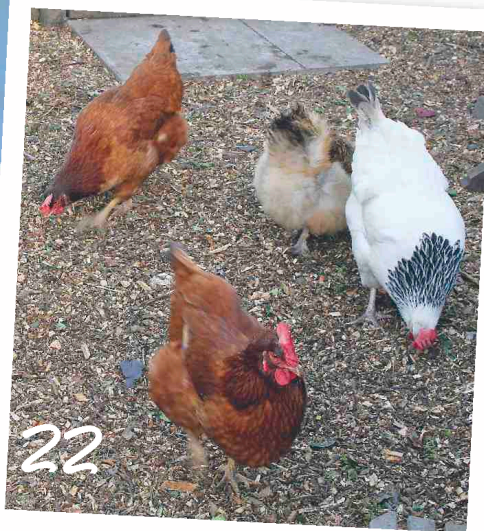
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Be on your guard

Meet this month's team...



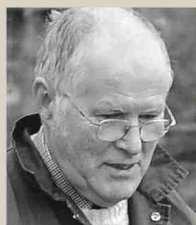
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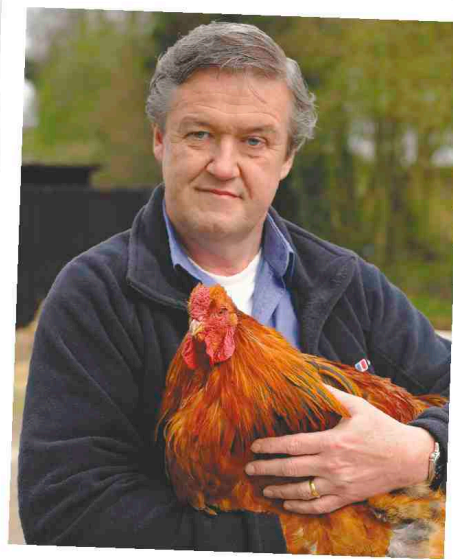
I broke a drinker the other morning. It was my own fault, of course; I was trying to clear it of ice and cracked the plastic base. While it was by no means a new drinker – or an expensive one – it still had some life left in it. So I was annoyed at my mistake.

Still, it served as a timely reminder about the importance of getting the husbandry basics right. Not heeding the warnings of a frosty night and failing to empty the drinkers at dusk, is what caused the problem. It's a simple thing to do, but a combination of shortage of time, forgetfulness and trusting to luck meant that I hadn't bothered.

The winter months are a time for avoiding short-cuts and, if anything, increasing your husbandry efforts to provide just that little bit extra care and attention for your hens. The wetter, colder and windier weather has a nasty habit of exposing and exploiting weaknesses, be they in the hen house roof, the nest box cover, the electric fence battery or the feed storage bin.

Predators and rodents inevitably become more urgent in their searches for easy pickings as natural sources of food become more scarce. The chicken pen can provide temptation that's hard to resist at this time of year; spilt feed, uneaten fruit and handily corralled, flightless chickens may all be on offer to hungry foxes, stoats, badgers, mink and rats.

So now's the time to re-double your husbandry efforts, heighten your vigilance and go that extra mile in terms of the effort



you're making to keep your garden hens both safe and happy.

Chickens themselves aren't generally fazed by our winter weather, but the stresses and strains that it can put on their immediate environment are what can lead to trouble. So keep your guard up and don't get caught out!

Chris Graham, Editor

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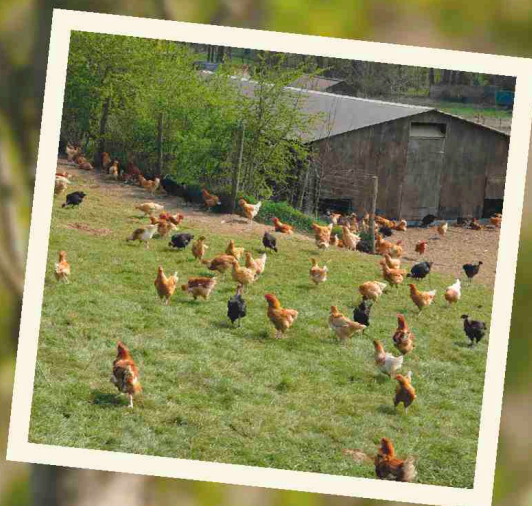
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POULTRY NEWS

→ **February** Your monthly guide to what's new in the world of poultry keeping

If you have a news story, product launch details or some other topical item, email pp.ed@kelsey.co.uk

Top sales



Trevor Addison, left, and son Andrew, with their Skipton poultry champions, joined by judge Reece Jowett, centre.

Retired auctioneer-turned-poultry showman, Trevor Addison, headed the pecking order when presenting the supreme champion pair of large white Wyandottes at the Craven Feather Auction Christmas Show at Skipton Auction Mart, back in December.

Mr Addison saw his 2014-hatched title winners – a cockerel and a pullet home-bred from prize-winning stock – first win the large fowl show class, then get chosen as overall champions by show judge, Reece Jowett.

The victors also ruled the roost on price when selling for the day's high

of £120, with Mr Addison also selling a second pair of large white Wyandottes for £90.

Other notable sale prices include £95 for a trio of Light Sussex, £65 for a trio of silver-laced Wyandottes and £55 for a trio of Light Sussex.

Craven Feather Auctions will continue to be staged regularly throughout 2015 on Saturdays, with the opening sale on January 17th, and the first show and sale scheduled for March 14th.

There's plenty more information at: www.ccmauctions.com.

New from Brinsea

Brinsea Products Ltd, the incubation specialist is to broaden its popular range of OvaEasy cabinet incubators, with the introduction for 2015 of the table-top OvaEasy 100.

Ideal for poultry breeders with a dozen or more layers, the new machine shares the advance temperature and humidity control system of its larger siblings in the range, can hold up to 96 chicken eggs and features a convenient and compact, counter-top design.

On sale from February 2015 for £575.00 (inc VAT), full details about the OvaEasy 100 are available from Brinsea Products Ltd by calling 08452 260120, or visiting the website at: www.brinsea.co.uk.



The new Brinsea OvaEasy 100

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If you're struggling for light in your chicken coop or poultry feed shed this winter, then a new product from www.electricfencing.co.uk could be just the answer.

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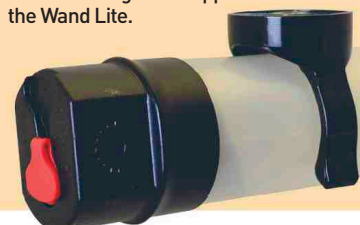
The unit is 800mm long, water-resistant and its low-consumption LED technology provides a 360° light output to offer useful illumination in the most awkward of places. A fitting kit is included (with 5m lead) but you will have to supply your own 12V battery.

The Wand Lite, which costs

£38.77, provides an effective, flicker-free alternative to conventional fluorescent tube lighting, has a service life of 70,000 hours and is supplied with a one-year guarantee. To place an order call 01620 860058, send an email to info@electricfencing.co.uk or visit: www.electricfencing.co.uk.

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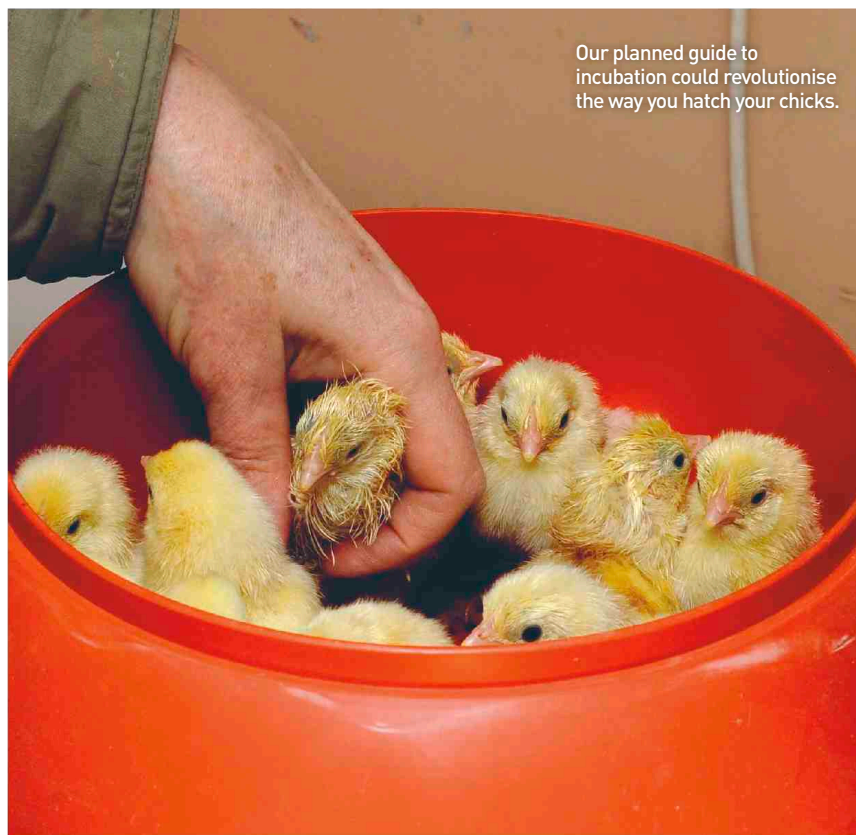
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Hatching secrets



Our planned guide to incubation could revolutionise the way you hatch your chicks.

Some good news as we're going to press with this issue, is that David Campbell, who runs HEKA Incubators UK, has agreed to provide an 'incubation masterclass' article in a forthcoming issue.

David, has spent many years carefully researching the theories and practices involved in successful chicken egg hatching, and has now hit upon a formula which he believes offers enthusiast keepers the best possible chance of incubation success.

He explained: "I'm excited at the prospect of sharing my extensive, practical experience and genetic research knowledge with *Practical Poultry* readers, to bring about a huge improvement in poultry breeding.

"Although a number of people have initially challenged the hatching programme I've devised because it flies in the face of what they've been doing up to now, the results achieved by those who adopt it speak for themselves.

"There are now top breeders achieving outstanding results in terms of both hatch rates and chick health; levels of success that previously they thought were impossible."

So, if you've had patchy success with your incubation methods in the past and feel sure that the chicks you're producing could be better, then keep an eye out for this article; it could very well revolutionise the way you do things.

A little bit more

Regrettably, it's been decided to increase the price of this magazine, by 10p, to £3.80.

While still less than others on the market, we appreciate that any increase at all places extra pressure on you, our loyal readers. However, we remain confident that this magazine represents the best value for money there is for chicken enthusiasts wanting authoritative, practical coverage on all aspects of their favourite hobby.

There's no other magazine providing the breadth of detailed content offered by this one, or the level of support that's so important for beginners getting started with their first birds.

One thing you can all be assured of is that *Practical Poultry* will continue to serve up its unique mix of down-to-earth, need-to-know, chicken-focussed information, and we sincerely hope that you consider 10p extra a small price to pay for this.

Youngstock Show success



Jed Dwight entertains during his photography talk at the Reading & District Bantam Society's successful Youngstock Show.

The Reading & District Bantam Society reports that its decision to give the end-of-year Youngstock Show a bit of a shake-up paid dividends. Instead of the usual, mid-week evening, the event was switched to a Saturday, and what a difference it made!

The organisers were delighted with both the attendance and the number of entries. The tea bar even sold out of cake! One of the highlights was seeing a few new juniors trying their hand at showing, as well as plenty of familiar faces.

Another highlight was the talk given by Jed Dwight, who was also judging the eggs on the day. Jed is well known for taking fantastic photographs at shows, and he explained many of the techniques he uses to capture that perfect shot.

Rob Whittingdon judged the birds, and special congratulations are due to Tim Millard, whose lovely OEG pullet won Best in Show, and to Cathie Phillips, whose Welsummer pullet was Reserve Best in Show.

Overall, though, the calibre of the birds shown at this event bodes well in terms of what can be expected at the RDBS Open Show, to be held at Northcroft Leisure Centre on February 21st-22nd.

In fact, this will be an extra special event as 2015 represents not only the 25th year of the show at Northcroft, but also the centenary of the British Belgian Bantam Club.

You can find out more about the very active Reading & District Bantam Society at: www.readingbantams.org.uk

And briefly...

ON THE COVER

Top spot this month goes to a dramatic study of an Ixworth male; one of the breeds featured in our *White wonders* article which starts on page 30.



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Meet Bill

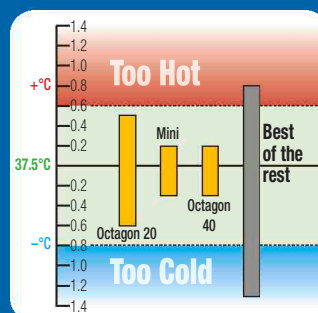
Clever chick!



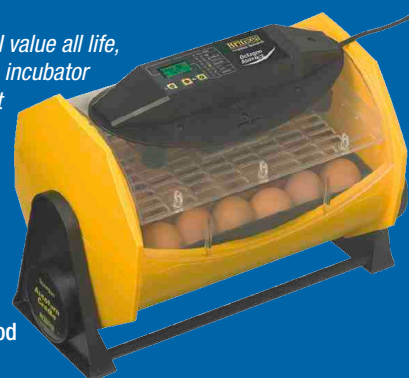
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Java

Chris Graham enjoys a close encounter with one of the rarest breeds currently in the UK

The exotically-name Java is, in fact, an American chicken breed. There's actually no documented connection between it and the Indonesian island of Java at all, and many in the US claim that this breed is an indigenous one. Fanciers there consider it to be among the oldest they have, although others in the poultry world, like rare breeds expert Tony Beardsmore here in the UK, dispute this. In Tony's opinion, the Java – or Black Java as it should be known – has demonstrable links with Asia. This, he says, is something that's been proven by genetic testing.

Nobody appears to know why the Java was given its name, but it certainly seems to suggest a rather more exotic point of origin than North America. Even this, though, doesn't appear to deflect the American fanciers who continue with the idea that the breed was born in the USA!

Early days

What's clear, however, is that the Java as we know it now was developed in America during the 1830s, and this certainly makes it one of that country's longest-established breeds. It found its way into the *American Poultry Standards*, printed in 1883, and became an extremely successful, utility-type breed in its own right. It was a good producer of both eggs and meat, and an excellent and resilient forager in the farmyard situation.

But the breed's most notable contribution to the world of poultry

wasn't its general usefulness, but the contribution it made to the creation of a number of what were to become world-famous commercial breeds.

The Java was used as a primary building block in the development of the Rhode Island Red, the Plymouth Rock and the Jersey Giant; three iconic, American breeds that were to conquer the world during the pre-hybrid era.

Unfortunately, though, the Java was very quickly to become a victim of its own success or, more accurately, the success it had helped to create. From its once lofty position near the top of the popularity stakes, numbers tumbled as producers switched to the newer, faster-maturing and more productive breeds.

This dramatic decline was all-but complete by the end of the 20th century, and a survey conducted in the late 1990s confirmed the situation with the conclusion that there were just 500 birds left, worldwide. These were confined to a handful of breeding flocks, plus the few birds still in the hands of enthusiast keepers.

Disappointingly, however, the Java has remained something of a forgotten breed. The survey results, shocking though they were, failed to trigger much of a reaction among the poultry establishment in the United States.

According to Tony, the situation in the UK is quite simply, dire. He is probably the only enthusiast currently keeping a viable flock of

IMPORTANT BUYING TIPS

A Wattles, face and ear lobes should all be bright red, on both black and mottled Javas. Texture should be smooth and fine. Any sign of white in the ear lobe is a very serious fault. The head itself is relatively small, in relation to the size of the body.

B Beak must be stout and well curved. On black birds the beak should be black too, but on the mottled, it should be horn-coloured, shading to yellow at the tip.

C The moderately-sized, single comb needs to be positioned very forward on the head, typically extending almost half way down the beak. It's set noticeably more forward than those found on typical European breeds. Ideally it needs to feature five spikes but, typically, you'll find six; five spikes plus the 'flat' at the back. The latter should rise up and not follow the line of the head/neck.

D The Java eye must be large, prominent and full. Ideally the colour needs to be dark brown.

E Back is broad along its entire length, and slightly inclined towards the base of the tail. The Java body itself presents a sturdy appearance and a somewhat boat-like outline.

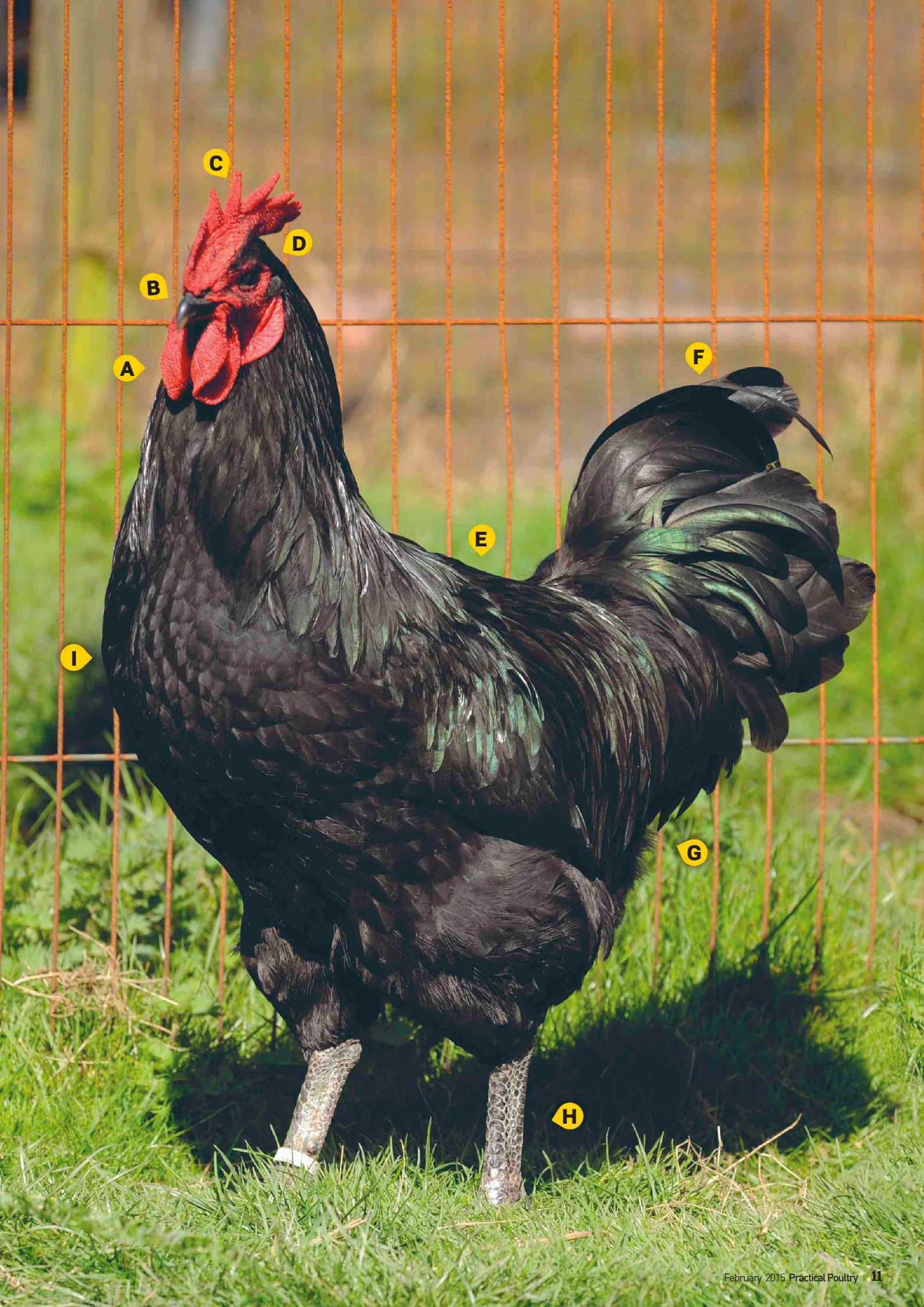
F Tail should be rather long and moderately full. On the male it should be held at 55° from the horizontal while, on the female it's slightly more upright, at 45°. Male birds should feature prominent and gracefully-curved sickle feathers.

G Wings are relatively large and held tight to the body with no sign of drooping. Their size accounts for the fact that the Java can fly a bit; run fences need to be six feet high to provide an effective barrier if containment is an issue.

H Legs should be set well apart and, on black-feathered birds, need to be as near black as possible, although willow green is acceptable. On mottled birds they will have a more leaden blue colour. In both cases, though, it's important that the underside of the feet is yellow.

I Being a table bird, the Java's breast needs to be deep, broad and full. On black birds, watch for white feathers – not a good sign. Mottled examples should ideally have every other feather tipped in well-defined white.

☞ The Java was used as a primary building block in the development of the Rhode Island Red.



Disappointingly, however, the Java has remained something of a forgotten breed.

Javas here; a working group he developed from stock he managed to import before the blanket ban was enforced following the first Avian Influenza scare.

While he sells birds and hatching eggs, and works tirelessly to promote the many virtues of the breed, it's the lack of new blood that's the most worrying aspect. With just an estimated 100 Javas in the UK, the majority of which have been bred by Tony, the long-term prospects don't look healthy.

The first Javas arrived in the UK in about 1900, and were mentioned in the first edition of the *British Poultry*

Right: A pronounced beetle-green sheen to the black feathers is an important requirement.

Below: The female Java presents a more upright stance than the male. When standing, it should be possible to draw an imaginary, vertical line from the back of the comb, through the eye and straight on down to the tips of the toes, on a good bird.

Standards (albeit briefly). In reality, the breed has never been popular enough here to warrant a full entry in the book and, regrettably, it's not even mentioned in the most recent edition.

Colour choice

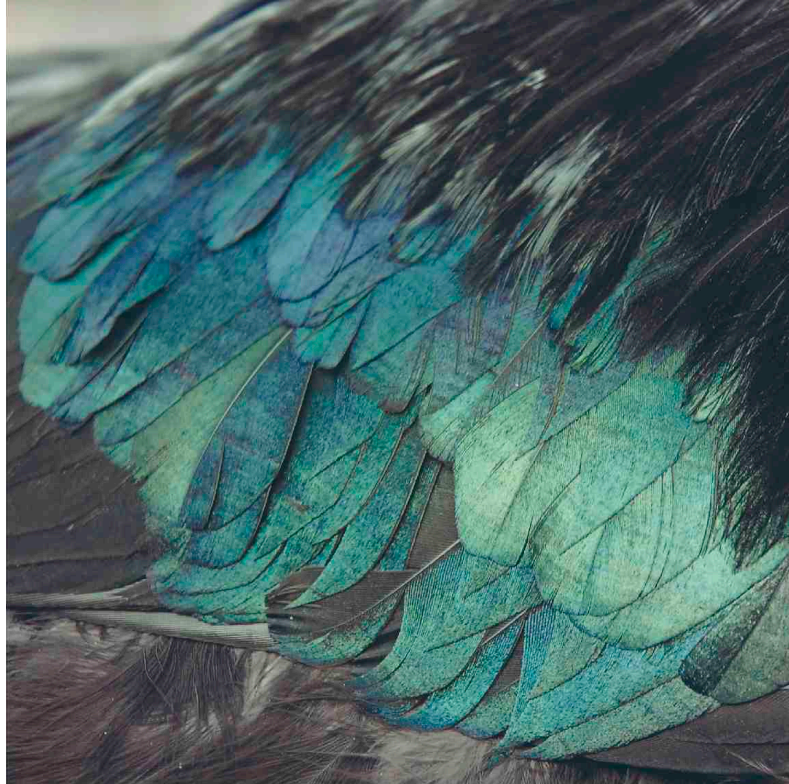
The Java is available in black, mottled and white plumage colours, although the white is a sport from the mottled which, although it does breed true, isn't regarded as a true colour variant here. All three are recognised in America but, although there isn't an official British standard for the breed, it's likely that the white would be omitted here.

These birds present a bold, alert and well-balanced general type, with a long, broad body, wide back, abundant saddle and longish, moderately full tail (held at 55° on male birds, and 45° on females). The breast is full and deep, reflecting the bird's table qualities, while the wings are large but neatly folded. Male birds should feature long, gracefully-curved sickle feathers and an abundantly-hackled neck.

The Java's head is relatively small for the body size, and features a stout, curved beak and large, dark eye. The comb should be single and upright, ideally with five, even spikes. The texture should be fine, as is that of the medium length, rounded wattles and the small, oblong ear lobes.

The bird stands on straight, stoutly-boned, well-spread legs, and each foot should have four, straight and well-spread toes. As far as

Java hens are perfectly capable of producing 230+ brown-shelled, good-sized eggs in a season.



Java at a glance...

Pluses:

- ✓ Very hardy
- ✓ Impressive layer
- ✓ Docile character
- ✓ Disease-resistant
- ✓ Loves to forage
- ✓ Useful table bird

Minuses:

- ✗ Extremely rare
- ✗ UK strains limited
- ✗ Decent flier
- ✗ No bantam version

Classification:

Heavy, soft feather, rare

Origin:

America

Weights:

🐔 **Large, Male** 4.30kg (9.5lb)

🐓 **Female** 3.40kg (7.5lb)

Egg laying: Approx. 230pa

Colours: Black, mottled, white

Mottled male.
Note the forward
positioning of the
comb, and the
way the back rises
away from the
head/neck.



➤ The Java lays good-sized eggs, and plenty of them! Those from the mottled tend to be lighter-shelled.

A pair of attractive,
mottled females; even
more rare than the
black version!



colour differences are concerned, the black Java should present very dark (nearly black) legs and feet, although some will have a tendency towards willow green.

Whichever is the case, though, the bottoms of the feet must be yellow. The face, comb, wattles and ear lobes should all be bright red, regardless of plumage colour, but the black versions should feature a dark beak.

The mottled Java differs in that it should have a horn-coloured beak (shading to yellow at the tip), and leaden blue legs, but with the same, yellow soles to the feet. With regard to feathering, the blacks should be just that, with a good, beetle-green sheen and a slate or light grey undercolour.

The mottled has a slightly more intricate feather colour pattern, with just about every other black feather tipped with sharply-defined white, and a slate undercolour.

Practical performer

It's ironic that the Java has fallen on such times because the bird



Buying guide

continues to retain much of its former performance glory. Even now, with overall numbers as low as they are and breeders struggling with so few strains, Java hens are perfectly capable of producing 230+ brown-shelled, good-sized eggs in a season. What's more, in common with other American breeds, they will continue laying right through into December (following a slighter later start, of course).

This is in marked contrast to the typical behaviour of most Asian and European breeds, that stop laying the moment the days start to shorten and the ambient temperature begins to fall. Generally, the mottleds tend to lay bigger eggs than the blacks, but both colours make great table birds, with the males tipping the scales at up to 9.5lb.

As far as character is concerned, the Java doesn't have an aggressive bone in its body; they aren't vicious to their keeper, or others in the flock. It's an extremely hardy breed, in keeping with its general-purpose, utility background, and these birds simply aren't fazed by either cold or wet weather.

The generally docile character means that Javas are easy to handle too, and that unrelated males will also tolerate each other's company in a shared run. Now, while this isn't something that I'd ever be happy to recommend that you try at home, I do have it on very good authority that the Java is so placid that harmless, male/male co-habitation is perfectly possible.



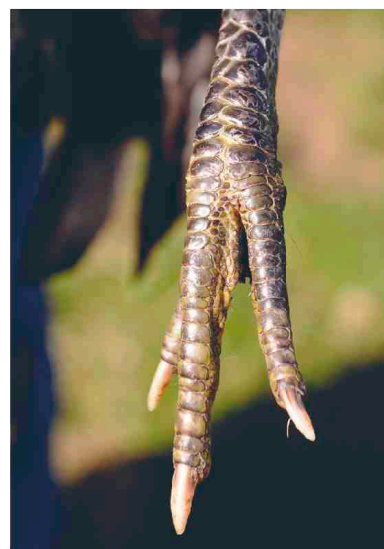
Above: Yellow colouring on the underside of the feet is a Java must-have feature.

As you might expect, these birds are good with children, however, care is needed if you intend mixing Javas with other breeds; there is a danger that they'll get picked on by more dominant birds.

So, all-in-all, the Java is a very straightforward bird to own assuming, that is, you can find any stock to buy in the first place. It demands no special requirements, will eat a perfectly normal diet and loves nothing more than to forage.

One thing that should be a consideration for those living in more built-up areas, though, is that this one's a bit of a flier. It'll easily flutter over four-foot fencing so, if containment is an issue, more serious precaution will need to be taken.

Right: Legs should be as dark as possible on the black.



Left: Undercolour on the black should be slate or light grey. It's generally darker on the mottled version.



Brilliant breeders

Javas breed well under normal circumstances, so keepers shouldn't have any problems in this respect. Of course, the real issue is finding unrelated birds with which to breed, and this is something that all keepers will have to face as things stand. Also, the hens aren't known for their broodiness, so you'll have to rely on an incubator (or broody from another breed) for hatching purposes.

It's also worth noting that the chicks are slow-growers; the youngsters will typically take about 16 months to reach maturity. This was probably another of the reasons why the breed fell away as a viable, commercial option; it simply couldn't compete financially with the faster-growing competition.

Back on the plus side, though, the Java's free-ranging, farmyard fowl-type background ensures that it's a hardy and disease-resistant bird in all respects. Consequently, it's not known as a characteristic sufferer with any of the common poultry complaints and, assuming good levels of care, attention and welfare, should prove to be a reliable and productive bird to keep.

There's no known bantam version and, if you're interested in buying stock, you should expect to pay between £40 and £60 per bird (regardless of colour).

Hatching eggs are also available from Tony (rarepoultry@talktalk.net), and these sell for £1.50 each. Currently, it's the black which is the more popular of the two colours, but that's probably because the mottled is so little known; there are probably only 20 in the UK, all of which have come from Tony.

☝☝ The Java's free-ranging, farmyard fowl-type background ensures that it's a hardy and disease-resistant bird.



Black Java male; note the large, dark eye.

OWNERS' VIEW: TONY BEARDSMORE

"I'm a great fan of the American rare breeds, and got my first Javas some time ago specifically to complement the other breeds from the United States that I keep.

"I thought it was very important to get started with the Java as it was such a notable foundation breed for a number of the most important American utility breeds, several of which I was already keeping.

"I wanted to be able to put right any faults that may arise in my breeding programmes with these other breeds and, having access to the Java really is the only way to be able to do this properly.

"As far as the other US breeds I keep are concerned, I have Jersey Giant, the Dominique, black and white large Sumatra, Buckeye, Delaware and the rose-combed Rhode Island Red.

"One of the Java's big advantages – something, in fact, that it has in common with all the other American breeds that I also keep – is that it's so easy and straightforward to look after. It truly is a pleasure to own and doesn't require any special treatment thanks to the climate here in the UK being milder than its USA homeland.

So, of all the rare breeds we've featured in this magazine, the Java must surely rank among the most scarce. Certainly in this country it's teetering on the brink of extinction, and desperately needs more help to ensure its survival.

Even in America the situation isn't much better. Despite the efforts of those involved with the breeding programme, overall numbers haven't increased very significantly so far. What growth there has been seems



"There really only is one drawback associated with this breed, and this relates to its continuing rarity. The problems caused by the lack of fresh blood in this country represent a serious issue for anyone looking to keep the breed long-term. It's an aspect that I've been working on for a number of years already, and I live in hope that the import regulations will be relaxed before it's too late.

"However, for those of you who can get hold of a few Javas now, I heartily recommend the breed. I think it's great to keep such an important and influential bird, and is something that I continue to find extremely rewarding."

CONTACT TONY?

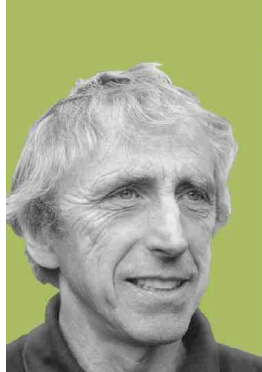
If you'd like to get in touch with Tony Beardsmore to find out more about his experiences with the Java, he can be contacted by sending an email to: rarepoultry@talktalk.net

to centre on the mottled and white versions, with the black remaining more or less static.

What must never be forgotten is that the loss of this breed would not only be a sad event in its own right, but it could also prove hugely significant for the spin-off breeds like the Rhode Island Red, Jersey Giant and Plymouth Rock. Serious problems with any of these in the future simply couldn't be put right without input from the Java. 🐔

JAVA SUPPORT

There's no dedicated breed club for the Java here in the UK, but the breed continues to be supported by the Rare Poultry Society. For more details, contact the secretary on 01263 577843, or by sending an email to: secretary@rarepoulttrysociety.org.uk



ANDY MARSHALL

Andy's been involved with chickens since he was a boy, is now a respected breeder and a very successful exhibitor

Andy's DIARY

The prospect of the new year in a new county, and with a completely new poultry set-up, is getting **Andy Marshall** excited as he looks ahead to 2015.

The development of our Devon poultry yard continues with the new roof for the old calf shed arriving and construction in full swing, ably assisted by one of our neighbours, Tim Roberts.

The size of rafters and purlins delivered came as quite a surprise. As they have to span 20' rather than the more usual 15, they're very heavy. Luckily there are only three to move, but we still had to eat a lot of spinach before we managed to get them to the calf shed. Lifting them up into place would have been impossible without some endless chains lifting gear.

My experience has always been in these matters that, while you may be desperately keen to get the job finished, it's usually best to slow down and make sure it's done properly. The result is always more satisfactory, lasts longer and still costs the same...

The birds in the field are really enjoying their freedom to roam; I'm surprised at just how much grass they've consumed. The runs are about 18 yards square with no more than eight birds in each. I make sure the late-afternoon wheat feed is always scattered somewhere different, to ensure an even take. Nevertheless, it's really noticeable just how much grass there is outside the run compared to what's left inside.

What I do know is that once the spring arrives, I must be sure to keep the grass short to prevent droppings sitting on top of the grass. They need to get down on to the soil where they can easily be assimilated by rain and earthworm action. This helps to ensure good, clean and sweet runs, and avoid horrible, smelly mud patches with the birds walking around in goodness knows what.

The golden rule is never to over-stock; chickens always need plenty of space. What's more, with such a range of breeds available, the temptation is to have lots of different ones. But my advice is always to avoid this. It's far better to stick to your favourite and work with that.

☘☘ With such a range of breeds available, the temptation is to have lots of different ones.



The new roof timbers for the calf shed were big and heavy, and certainly took some lifting!

Having not taken any birds out to an exhibition for a while, the temptation to dabble again in the show scene is proving difficult to resist. This isn't helped by show secretaries sending me schedules.

I now have a few birds that I think look quite good, and represent their respective breeds rather well. However, if I start entering shows then I'll lose weekend work time in the pens, so I'm continuing to resist. The trouble is, when I see the birds strutting around outside, it really is quite tempting!

I've had the honour of being nominated to judge all the Sussex colours (other than Light) at the Sussex Club show in November, which is a great privilege, and something I shall look forward to. In the meantime, I've been asked to judge at Devon Fanciers in February and Taunton in March. Exhibitors tell me that these are great shows, so I'm really looking forward to them as well, despite having to leave the tools idle at home.

It's really important for judges to take their roles seriously. Equally the exhibitors; it's not fair on fellow exhibitors if you bring birds that aren't fit or have 'visitors' (fleas or mite). So always make sure that show birds are clean.

Don't do what I did once, many years ago, which was fail to clean out a travel box as

the shows were only two weeks apart. The shavings looked perfectly usable so I thought all was well.

One of the birds came third but the judge had a quiet word afterwards, telling me he'd found fleas. It was extremely embarrassing. Now, no matter how clean the used shavings look, they always go on the bonfire the day after a show and the box is sprayed or dusted.

Just as exhibitors have a responsibility, likewise judges need to handle the birds they are judging with great care; not simply grab, inspect and push back into the pen.

I vividly recall watching from the balcony at one Hants & Berks Show, where a judge was handling Pekin bantams quickly and badly. The very nature of these birds means that they require time and patience to assess them properly. A Pekin exhibitor standing beside me was far from pleased.

So judges need to remember that they too are being keenly observed by the exhibitors, and need to make themselves available for questions after judging. While this isn't always practical if travelling long distances, sending in a judge's report is always appreciated and expected where major club shows are involved.

Anyway, here's wishing judges, exhibitors and everyone else with a passion for chickens a very happy Christmas and a great 2015! 🐔



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Contact information: 01665578638
admin@calibrateenergy.co.uk
www.calibrateenergy.co.uk

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Calibrate Energy specialise in commercial and industrial Heatpumps with specialised control solutions throughout the country. A standard system for Calibrate is utilising a primary renewable (wind, solar or hydro) and tying it back to the heatpump system, so when there is free electricity the heatpump utilises this, or in layman's terms when the sun shines or the wind blows the heatpump starts up, thereby offsetting the required electricity usage completely and further increasing your bottom line.

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NOTE: The below calculations are based on the average heating days for the Northeast and do not take into account any excess usage, or the index linked compounding tariff figure. The payback figure is calculated with a 10% deposit and 5% interest rate.

Running hours are based on (hrs):	2060	4120
Tier 1 (1314hrs x 120kW x 0.087p kWh)	£13,718.16	£13,718.16
Tier 2 (746/2806hrs x 120kW x 0.026p kWh)	£2,327.52	£8,754.72
Oil/LPG Savings	£7,500.00	£13,000.00
Total GSHP savings and income per year	£23,545.68	£35,472.88
Heatpump electricity usage 2060/4120hrs x 120kW	247,200kWh	494,400kWh
kWh ÷ 3 (efficiency of heat pumps at 300%)	82,400kWh	164,800kWh
kWh x 12p (electricity costs)	£9,888.00	£19,776.00
Maintenance and repair	£1,000.00	£1,000.00
Total yearly actual (Savings/income – costs)	£12,657.68	£14,696.88

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- David Robson,

Morpeth, Northumberland

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The Gallery

Send in your favourite poultry picture and be in with a chance of winning a copy of *Getting started with chickens* *



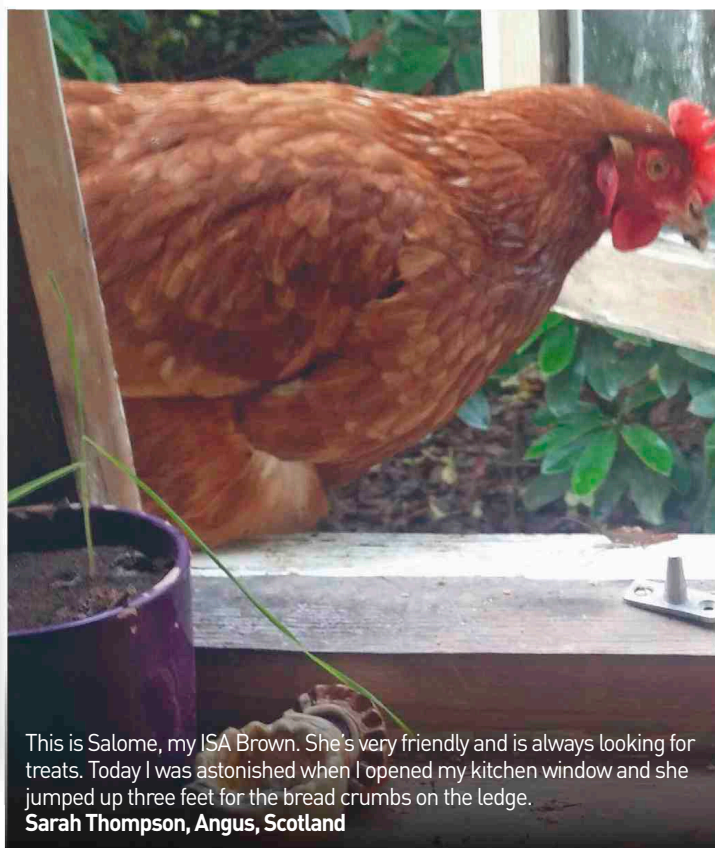
▲ Here's a photo I took of my brother, Richard, with his small garden flock. **Mike Evans, via email**



▲ Just found two of our girls on a pamper day in the back garden, dust-bathing under a cloche in one of our veg beds! They're two old ladies now and I don't blame them for trying to find somewhere warm and dry on a damp winter's day. **Garth & Lizzie Brayne, Newport, Shrops.**



▲ This is my daughter Amelia (5) with Babs, our babcock. Babs adores her cuddles and Amelia loves her to bits; a happy combination all around! **Allie Wonnacott, Norwich, Norfolk**



This is Salome, my ISA Brown. She's very friendly and is always looking for treats. Today I was astonished when I opened my kitchen window and she jumped up three feet for the bread crumbs on the ledge. **Sarah Thompson, Angus, Scotland**



▲ Here's Frodo, my lovely Silkie, resting from raising chicks and enjoying the autumn leaves. **Fiona Wilson, Trowbridge, Wilts.**



▲ My daughter, Georgina (15), took this photo of our 10 cross-breed bantams that were hatched this summer. They are a comical lot but, unfortunately, eight out of the 10 are boys. Anyone fancy giving them a home?
Anna Thirtwell, Sykehouse, E. Yorks.



▲ Here's my son, Christopher, with his Khaki Campbell duckling, called Aimee. **Natalie Traves, Easingwold, N. Yorks.**



PRIZE-WINNING PICS!

One copy of *Getting started with chickens* is up for grabs every month!

✉ Post a print to the editor:

The Gallery, Practical Poultry, Kelsey Publishing Ltd, Cudham, Tithe Barn, Berry's Hill, Cudham TN16 3AG or email a digital image to: pp.ed@kelsey.co.uk

Remember to supply details of what's in the picture, who took it and where you're from.



▲ Speckles has detected an imposter in the garden...

▼ ...and here's Blue checking me out for treats. **Wendy Noblet, Preston**



The Gallery *continued...*



▲ This is my chamois-laced, frizzled Poland cockerel, called Fizz. He loves getting lifted up to eat the berries on the bush. Here also drops some down to his hens, so it's one for him and one for them! **Danny Brennan (13), Donaghadee, Co. Down, NI**



▲ This is my flock of Shamos; Gnasher, Smasher, Dino and Wheat! **Harvey Hedges, Oxfordshire.**



PRIZE-WINNING PICS!

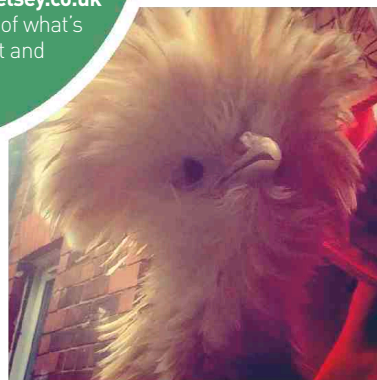
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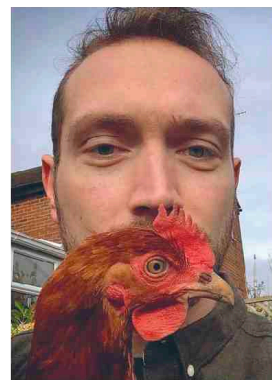


▲ This is Chipmunk. I called her this because, when she hatched, she looked just like a little chipmunk! **Kelly Crowley, Gravesend, Kent.**

▶ The motley crew in the garden. From left to right: Arthur, Mrs, Limahl, Pookie, Mr, Percy and Bertie. Photo by my husband, Gary Wilkes. **Jo Matthews, Thirsk, N. Yorks.**



▲ Here's my young Poland frizzle 'selfie'. I've always wanted one of these birds, and have now finally found one. **Helen Dunning, Whitchurch, Shrops.**



▲ This my son, Andrew, meeting Joan for the first time. She took her first selfie is Newcastle under Lyme! **John Wiggins, via email**





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Chicken and chips!

Alan Holtham reveals his secrets for dealing with the sort of muddy mess in the chicken run that winter so often brings.

As winter sets in, my main chicken run has started to degenerate into the usual, depressingly muddy quagmire; a situation that, in past years, hasn't improved until the drying winds of early April.

Consequently, the birds always have wet feet, which is miserable for them, particularly when it's cold – I gather that a lot of their body heat is lost through the feet. Coupled to this, there's the objectionable smell that soon starts to become very noticeable, as well as the unpleasantness of wading through sticky mud every time I go into the run.

What's more, muddy hens' feet

▲ This is the kind of unsightly quagmire that I've been having to put up with in my chicken run; time for a change, I think.

means dirty eggs, which certainly aren't appealing if you're trying to sell them. Finally, I'm also aware that the continual wet must increase the likelihood of pest and disease problems so, all in all, it's a problem that I'm determined to beat.

Bedraggled birds

In my defence, there are two small covered areas within the run which are dry underfoot, but the birds seem to prefer to stand out in the mud looking wet and bedraggled, and the whole set-up generally looks very unprofessional. Unfortunately, I don't have any spare space to give the run a rest, which would be the ideal situation plus, if I'm honest, it's probably a bit overstocked, too.

So, dreading another miserable winter, I decided to tackle the muddy run surface once and for all, by laying down a cleaner alternative. But I soon

realised that there were several viable options, depending on budget and also the degree of permanence.

The choices available for the run boiled-down to four options. 1. Pave it over with concrete slabs, then add a scratching litter on top. This is the most expensive option, particularly as the run is an odd shape, requiring a lot of cutting. Also, it is permanent and I have in mind that I might need to move the run in the future.

2. Rubber chippings; this one quite appealed to me for its green credentials, but it would need matting underneath to stop the chippings disappearing into the mud. It's also an expensive choice (about £7 for a 10kg bag) and I reckoned I'd need 50 bags plus the underlay. Also, what do you do with the chippings if you ever stop using the run?

3. Use gravel as a deep litter. This is a cheaper option (about £75 for

☛☛ The birds seem to prefer to stand out in the mud looking wet and bedraggled.



☛ I was lucky to find a 'chicken friendly' tree surgeon who turned up with a huge truckful.

tip you a load for a nominal fee or even no cost at all.

I was lucky to find a 'chicken friendly' tree surgeon who turned up with a huge truckful, which he was happy to exchange for some eggs; the perfect trade!

The content of the woodchip is very variable, depending on what they have been cutting. In this case it was a real mix of hard and softwood chippings, along with a lot of shredded conifer foliage. It smelt wonderful and soon started steaming on the drive as it started the inevitable composting process.

This is, in fact, what happens to the woodchip in your run. It will quickly start to break down, composting into the underlying soil surface, so it will need topping up on a regular basis. Do however check that there is no Yew or Laurel foliage included in the shreds, as both can be extremely toxic.

If you buy it ready-bagged from a poultry supplier, the consistency is much more uniform with more definite woodchips, but this will probably cost you about £8.50 for a 70-litre bag. So taking this route is a more expensive option if you have a large area to cover; I would have needed at least 30 bags!

However, a good layer of properly-maintained woodchip should last at least six months (possibly more in drier weather). Every so often it'll need a good raking over and top-up, but this is easy as the material is so light, a wonderful contrast to the hard, compacted mud that typically develops in many chicken runs. As the woodchip is lighter than the underlying mud, regular raking causes it to rise to the surface to create a clean top layer.

Habitual diggers

In my case, the birds in the run I'm dealing with are serious excavators, and regularly undermine the legs of the coop with their digging, causing it to tilt alarmingly. In addition, the big holes they create soon fill with water and the surface becomes very difficult to walk over. However,

an 850kg bag). I'd worked out that I would need three bags but, it's semi-permanent, needs an underlying membrane and requires regular hosing to keep clean. Also, I was concerned that it wouldn't be very 'scratching-friendly' for the birds.

4. Woodchip. This is by far the cheapest option, though I realise that it would require continual maintenance to keep it 'sweet', making it more labour-intensive. Containment would be an on-going issue, too, to stop the birds scratching it out of the run. On the plus side, the used material makes fantastic compost, (very like the Easichick bedding I have just discovered and now use all the time), and the whole lot would be easy to remove if I ever relocate the run.

Practical option

So, on the grounds of expense and permanence – or, actually, lack of

both! – I settled for the woodchip option. I know there's been some talk about it causing respiratory or fungal problems for the birds, but I couldn't find any convincing evidence to support these suggestions. I do wonder if part of the problem has been caused by people experiencing problems after using bark chippings instead of woodchip, which I know does have some real fungal issues linked to it.

The best source of woodchip is your local tree surgeon. These individuals produce huge volumes of it as a by-product of their work and, as they often have to pay to dispose of it, they're usually happy to

▲ A truckful of woodchip from a local tree surgeon was delivered in return for a few eggs; a great deal!



▲ My hens are great diggers and the holes they create fill with water during wet weather.



◀ Muddy feet means dirty eggs.



Good husbandry

☛☛ A good layer of properly-maintained woodchip should last at least six months.

they do seem appreciate the dry soil area underneath the coop which has become a favourite dust bath.

I decided to stabilise the coop by laying an area of concrete flagstones, raising them up on the existing surface to form something of an edging for the woodchip. For simplicity, I always bed flags on a good layer of building sand, but rake a shovelful of cement into the surface. This sets with time to produce a hard foundation that stops the slabs moving, but is easily removable should you change your ideas later.

I also extended the front to provide a hard standing for the pophole ramp. As the dust bath is so important, I left a space to form a definite bathing area under the coop, lining this with concrete edgings to try and contain as much of the soil as possible as they flap it about.

I mixed in a good amount of clean sand, then topped it off with a generous covering of diatomaceous earth to provide the perfect bathing dust! Now, no matter what the weather, they have a permanently dry area for their daily, insect-ridding ablutions!

I also paved a small, dry 'landing' area just inside the entrance gate to the run, partly to stop the birds building up too much woodchip behind the gate, making it difficult to open, and also to stop them digging out under the gate.

For the best effect the woodchip layer needs to be at least 4in thick, ideally six or even more, so you'll need to dig out a lot of the soil. After four years of intensive chicken use, I



I always bed flags on a good layer of building sand, and rake a shovelful of cement into the surface.

reckoned this soil would be extremely fertile and nitrogen-rich, so I simply scattered it on the borders in the garden to give them a boost.

Containment issues

To contain the woodchip I decided that treated timber would be the best option. You can buy these 'gravel boards' from DIY stores in 2m lengths for about £6 a board. This gets a bit pricey if you have a big run to edge so, as an alternative, try your local timber merchant. The one I found sold me treated timber in 4.8m lengths of tanalised 6x1 for £6.57; a much cheaper option.

I cut these to length and simply screwed them to the surrounding fence posts. For speed, you could nail them on and, either way, these treated boards should last a good 10 years. However, as my fence posts are long



Concrete edgings were used to contain the dust bath contents, consisting of clean, dry sand and diatomaceous earth.



▲ I installed a paved, dry 'landing' just inside the run gate, to stop the birds building up too much woodchip behind it and prevent digging underneath.

past their best, I shall be renewing these soon, and it'll be very much easier to simply unscrew the boards to replace the posts rather than deal with nails.

The existing, pressure-treatment should be enough in the way of preservative, but the light colour seemed rather obtrusive, so I gave them a quick coat of dark stain, purely for aesthetic reasons.



I decided to pave the base for the hen house, and extended this out for the pop hole ramp. I also left space for a dust bath.

Pressure-treated boards were screwed to the base of the run perimeter fence, to keep the woodchip contained. Because of their light colour, I gave them a quick coat of dark stain, purely for aesthetic reasons.



The birds seem delighted with their new run floor.

👏 I now no longer feel ashamed of the run; it looks really smart and the birds should be happier and healthier, too.

◀ It's important that the woodchip layer is at least 6in deep, even deeper if you can manage it.

action causes it to heat up, the surface becomes slightly warm to the touch, so no more cold feet for the girls. I'm also getting perfectly clean eggs again, which is another great advantage.

The under-coop dust bath has been a great success, too, though even the high sides do little to contain the effects of the birds' over-enthusiastic flapping!

As well as all the obvious advantages, I now no longer feel ashamed of the run; it looks really smart and the birds should be happier and healthier, too. We'll just have to see how it stands up to the full onslaught of a British winter, and how often it needs to be topped-up. I'll keep you posted! 🐔

▼ I can at last be proud of the way my chicken run now looks. It'll be interesting to see how it copes with winter's worst.

You can then start the fun part of barrowing-in the woodchip to build up a really thick layer. Unfortunately in my case, this involved a 50m walk with each barrowful to the bottom of the garden, so it took the best part of weekend to get it all shifted. But at least it kept me warm!

The results though are fantastic and, so far, completely mud free! The birds just love scratching around in it searching for worms and bugs, but they do soon scatter it far and wide, hence the need for the containment boards around the edge. Thankfully, it's both quick and easy to brush or rake the woodchip back level again as required.

The finished layer is soft and clean to walk on and, as the composting



Safe as houses?

Chris Graham summarises the dos and don'ts of buying your first hen house, a purchase that's likely to be the biggest chicken-related one you ever make.



With most, half-decent hen houses you see on the market these days commanding prices of several hundred pounds, avoiding mistakes when you buy is important, especially for those on tight budgets.

The popularity of the chicken-keeping hobby now means that hen house sales is big business, and there are new suppliers appearing on an almost weekly basis. The 'old guard' manufacturers are being joined by a host of new producers and, of course, everyone's an expert these days!

☞☞ Quality varies dramatically across the market, so it's important to know a little bit about what you're buying.

▲ There are many variables influencing the choice of poultry house, including the space available, the number of birds being kept, budget and the level of commitment you're prepared to put in. Ark-style house/run combinations like these can only contain a handful of birds each, and need to be moved on a daily basis for the best results.

The problem is that quality varies dramatically across the market, so it's important to know a little bit about what you're buying before you hand over the cash. Mistakes in this field can be expensive ones and, regrettably, there's an increasing amount of misinformation out there about what you should and shouldn't be looking for when it comes to housing your precious garden hens.

Serious mistakes

Probably the two most serious mistakes you can make are buying a chicken house that's badly made, or one that's too small for your needs. Both can have dire consequences for the ultimate health and welfare of your birds, but the trouble is that neither factor is necessarily obvious right from the off.

The first rule for those new to the hobby is always to deal with an experienced and well-respected house supplier. It's essential that you get sensible and practical advice concerning the options available, and that you're not simply sold the unit that the sales operative most wants to shift that day.

For this reason, my advice would be to seek out and deal with a house supplier that manufactures their own product on site. By and large, these sorts of operation have a better working knowledge of their products, and can offer guidance that's both practical and authoritative.

There's also a much better chance that, should anything go wrong, you'll be able to get something useful done about it. 'Flat-packs' from the Far East are all well and good if you're buying a



cheap wardrobe but, as far as chicken houses are concerned, they can leave a lot to be desired.

Lots of the houses being shipped in from abroad nowadays are copies of the most successful and established designs being made here in the UK. All well and good, you may think, as these alternatives usually offer a cheaper option. But things are generally cheaper for a reason and, in this case, material quality and build accuracy are typically the crucial aspects that suffer.

The thickness of wood used is a key aspect, both in terms of its ultimate durability and day-to-day effectiveness. Traditionally, the rule of thumb for a durable, effective hen house is that it's built from solid wood that's not less than 19mm thick, and this still holds true today.

Unfortunately, this basic standard is being increasingly ignored these days, as producers opt to save both cash and weight by using a reduced material thickness. The trouble with this is that, although the finished house may look OK outwardly when new, the thinner timber is likely to be prone to warping and splitting once exposed to the great British climate.

Warp factor

On the face of it, a bit of panel distortion might not seem much of a problem – especially if you've saved yourself a couple of hundred quid on the purchase price – but let me assure you that it can have serious consequences for the birds.

As well as doors, windows and pop holes becoming a poor fit and/or awkward to use, joints elsewhere in the structure could well open up, leading potentially to draughts and water ingress. A damp and draughty environment inside a hen house is, of course, just about the worst thing imaginable as far as the welfare of the chickens roosting inside is concerned, and will quickly raise stress levels and

▲ A small, well-built hen house with run extension attached.

▼ Solid wood construction using properly treated timber of a good thickness is the key to a long-lasting and effective hen house. But units like this don't come cheap.

promote all sorts of diseases, including respiratory problems.

But good design is obviously a key factor too, which typically runs hand-in-hand with the use of quality materials. Although it's very important to ensure a draught-free environment inside, this isn't to say that there should be no air movement at all. In fact, good ventilation is essential for healthy hens; air needs to circulate so that the warm, damp air can be vented to the atmosphere and replenished with a fresh supply from outside. Consequently, sensibly positioned and adequate ventilation slots or holes are needed in or close to the roof, together with inlet points in the side or end walls. The latter can be windows or meshed holes or slots. The important thing is that they aren't at floor level because this will simply create draughts.

☞ Thinner timber is likely to be prone to warping and splitting once exposed to the great British climate.

Any house manufacturer or supplier should be well aware of these requirements and their significance with regard to general hen welfare so, if you detect any vagueness or reluctance when discussing a potential purchase, then move on and find another outlet.

As far as house design is concerned, the first choice you have to make is whether you want a movable or a fixed unit. This will ultimately depend on your individual situation, the space you have available and the number of birds you intend to keep.

At the bottom of the price scale you'll find the ark-style house, triangular in cross-section and typically designed in a couple of ways. These pointy units – apparently shaped like this to stop sheep from jumping on top of them in the days when farmers ran mixed stock together – can nowadays be bought as 'single' or 'double' storey. The former have a roosting compartment at one end, while the latter feature an 'upstairs' house area reached by a ramp.



Getting started

It's a working unit that needs to function properly if the birds using it are to remain healthy and happy.

Double-deckers

The two-storey approach has the advantage that the full 'footprint' of the unit is available as a run area although, being tucked away in the point of the apex, the living accommodation can be a little on the cramped side. The other limitation of the ark style is that the sloping sides make headroom limited everywhere apart from down the central line of the unit, so comb and tail feather damage is a possibility as birds inevitably rub against the wire mesh sides.

The big advantage of the ark design, though, is its 'portability'. An appropriate number of birds can be left to live in one of these units, as long as it's moved to fresh ground every day or two. Not only is this good for the birds because they're always on fresh ground, but the natural fertilisation also works wonders for the ground generally.

But if you fancy a more permanent-style hen house then the choice is much greater. Also, the sky's the limit in terms of what you can pay. However, while there are certainly some very attractive units available nowadays, it's important not to get too bogged-down by outward appearance. While it's great to have a hen house that looks fantastic at the bottom of the garden, always remember that it's a working unit that needs to function properly if the birds using it are to remain healthy and happy.

Essentially, a poultry house must guarantee shelter from wind and rain, provide a dry floor, good amounts of



▲ It is possible to buy secondhand houses like this one; many decades old and still going strong! Note the timber skids underneath to aid movement, but you'd need a tractor too!

▼ A good house will have well thought-out ventilation arrangements, be made of sturdy timber and fastened together with stainless steel fixings. Details like this count in the long run.

natural light, protection from draughts, adequate ventilation and a safe place to lay eggs.

Nest boxes can be built on to the outside of the house to maximise interior floor space, and should always be at the darker end of the roosting compartment, and out of any direct sunlight.

As a rule, allow one box for every three hens and, in an ideal world, each should have a 30x30cm opening, and be 20-25cm deep. Make them much larger than this and more than one bird might try to use them at the same time, which is bad news and usually results in cracked eggs.

Interior fittings

Perches for roosting on are another poultry house essential. The thickness of these is important; a minimum of 5cm wide for large fowl (slightly narrower for smaller breeds) is recommended. Also, rounded-off top edges will make them more comfortable to use.

Perch height needs to be set above floor level (not too high), but appreciably higher than the nest boxes. Chickens will naturally roost at the highest point then can find and, ideally, you don't want them settling in the nest boxes at night.

A removable droppings board under the perches is a practical and desirable feature, too. Hens also enjoy natural light in their houses, and some of the

'luxury' structures offer windows providing this (and ventilation). These aren't usually glazed but are wired with mesh, and have an external wooden shutter that can be opened or closed depending on the weather. The mesh, of course, leaves the house secure for night-time opening during the summer.

Many house suppliers calculate the bird capacities of their units by working out the number of birds that can roost side-by-side on the perches provided. They allow an arbitrary 20cm or so per bird, but this really only produces a theoretical maximum figure, and shouldn't be taken as a practical guide.

It's far safer to cut this recommended bird total by a third, or even in half; you'll be doing your hens a big favour. It's not uncommon to see small 3x3' houses being marketed as suitable for six birds. In reality, this limited space would be much better suited to just three or four.

As a real-world guide, a house measuring 4'x3' will be suitable for four or five large fowl or 6-7 bantams. Working up from this, allowing a minimum of two square feet of floor area per bird, a 6'x4' house could accommodate 10-12 birds.

Whatever house you choose, though, it's always better to buy slightly bigger than you think you'll need. Not only will this give the birds you keep that extra bit of space, it'll also allow for the inevitable expansion of the flock as you get more into the hobby! 🐔



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Alan & Kate Sims, Doddiscombeigh, Exeter, UK, November 2014 at the National Poultry Show

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TOP CHOICE

White wonders!

With winter upon us, and frost and snow an ever-present possibility, it seems appropriate this month that we spotlight a bevy of white-feathered lovelies!



Croad Langshan

The Croad Langshan offers very acceptable laying performance, and will continue to do so for much longer than the typical hybrid hen. They can be bought for about the same price and are just as easy to look after.

This breed, first imported from the Langshan region of northern China by Major FT Croad in 1872, has been much refined since then and today offers a great prospect for the back garden keeper. It's a docile and friendly bird which is great in a family environment. Levels of hardiness are excellent and the hens make terrific broodies, for those keepers interested in natural incubation. Apart from the Croad Langshan's relative rarity, there really are no significant downsides to this breed.

- **Origin:** China
- **Weight:** Large male, 4.10kg (9lb) min.
female, 3.20kg (7lb) min.
Bantam male, 770-910g (27-32oz)
female 650-790g (23-28oz)
- **Egg laying:** 160-180pa

BUYING BIRDS

The Croad Langshan Club
Lyn Heigl, tel: 01420 511555
Email: lynh@croadlangshan.org.uk
Website: www.croadlangshan.org.uk



TOP CHOICE
A docile
and friendly
bird



TOP CHOICE
A good layer,
fast-growing
hardy

Ixworth

Breeds like the Ixworth, with its British underpinnings, excellent utility credentials and straightforward character work really well as a straightforward and productive pure breed chicken for the back garden.

The brainchild of Reginald Appleyard in the early 1930s, the Ixworth was named after the small Suffolk village, and developed with the aim of creating a top-quality, no-nonsense meat bird, a useful layer and a rugged free-ranger. White Sussex, white Orpington, white Minorca and Indian (Cornish) Game (Jubilee and dark) are thought to have been used in the breeding mix.

The result ticked all the boxes but, ultimately, couldn't compete commercially with the modern hybrid layers and meat birds that arrived from the USA after WW2.

So the Ixworth is a hardy, fast-growing bird that lays a decent number of eggs, is non-aggressive and presents a generally docile temperament. However, there's no dedicated breed club, so sourcing stock can be a bit of a struggle; but it's certainly worth the effort.

- **Origin:** Suffolk, England
- **Weights:** Large: Male, 4.10kg (9lb)
Female, 3.20kg (7lb)
- **Egg laying:** 200+pa

BUYING BIRDS

The Rare Poultry Society
Tel: 01263 577843
Email: secretary@rarepoultrysociety.org.uk
Website: www.rarepoultrysociety.co.uk



Wyandotte

The Wyandotte – apparently named after the Wyandot native American people from Ohio, USA – was developed during the 1870s-’80s. The silver-laced version came first, and is thought to have been created using a breeding mixture of Cochin, Brahma, Hamburgh, Poland and Sebright stock.

The first examples arrived in the UK in 1884, and proved an instant hit. Alternative colours soon followed, with the gold-laced arriving first, followed by the white, black and partridge, then the rest. The Wyandotte we have today is a hardy breed that remains a good layer and is easy to keep in the back garden environment. The males can also still be grown into decent table birds, for those inclined to do so.

As with a number of other pure breeds, though, large fowl Wyandottes are getting more difficult to source these days, but there are still plenty of bantams.

- **Origin:** America
- **Weight:** Large male, not less than 4.08kg (9lb)
female, not less than 3.17kg (7lb)
Bantam male, not to exceed 1.70kg (3¾lb)
Female, not to exceed 1.36kg (3lb)
- **Egg laying:** 175pa

BUYING BIRDS

The White Wyandotte Club
Mrs D Procter, tel: 01254 878319



TOP CHOICE
Easy to keep
friendly and
docile

Leghorn

The Leghorn originated in Italy, as one of the white ear-lobed Mediterranean breeds, and quickly developed a reputation as an excellent layer. But it was in America that the breed was most extensively developed; brown examples went out there during the 1830s, with the white following soon after. There the breed helped with the creation of the Rhode Island Red and, later, the modern hybrid layer. The Leghorn first arrived in the UK during the 1870s, and was later to become the mainstay of the commercial laying flock.

Today's birds retain that laying prowess and remain easy and straightforward to keep. Breeding is simple, too, and the fact that there are good numbers around (especially bantams) helps keep prices very affordable. On the downside, the Leghorn is a recognised flier, so containment can be an issue. Also, large fowl versions are becoming increasingly scarce these days, and the Mediterranean temperament can make handling a bit of an issue, particularly with birds that have been bought in as adults.

- **Origin:** Italy, via America
- **Weight:** Large male 3.4kg (7.5lb)
female 2.5kg (5.5lb)
Bantam male 1,020g (36oz) max
female 910g (32oz) max
- **Egg laying:** 200+pa

BUYING BIRDS

The Leghorn Club
Richard Grice, tel: 01833 660260
Email: richard.grice7@btinternet.com
Website: www.theleghornclub.com

TOP CHOICE
Cracking layer,
but can be
flighty



Sussex

Often referred to as the 'farmer's fowl', the Sussex is a breed with its roots set in Southern England. For most of the 19th century, it enjoyed an all but unchallenged reputation for being top-quality table fowl and, consequently, its home county became the centre of a vibrant and lucrative fattening industry, centred on the East Sussex town of Heathfield. Initial development was a slow process, resulting from the gradual inter-breeding of indigenous Surrey, Sussex and Kent fowl.

The white was one of the last colours to be created and today's versions still offer a cracking, dual-purpose option for enthusiast and/or pet chicken keepers alike. These birds present a wonderful temperament, are very easy to handle and non-fliers. The hens make reliable, broody mothers and all will be hardy and resistant to disease.

The only points to note on the downside are that the cockerels tend to be noisy crows and can also get feisty during the breeding season.

TOP CHOICE
Traditional
with bags of
appeal

- **Origin:** England
- **Weight**
Large male 4.10kg (9lb) minimum
female 3.20kg (7lb) minimum
Bantam male 1,530g (54oz) max.
female 1.133g (40oz) max.
- **Egg laying**
200-250pa

BUYING BIRDS

The Sussex Club
Mrs Pat Gage, tel: 01364 653182
Email: pat.gage2@btinternet.com



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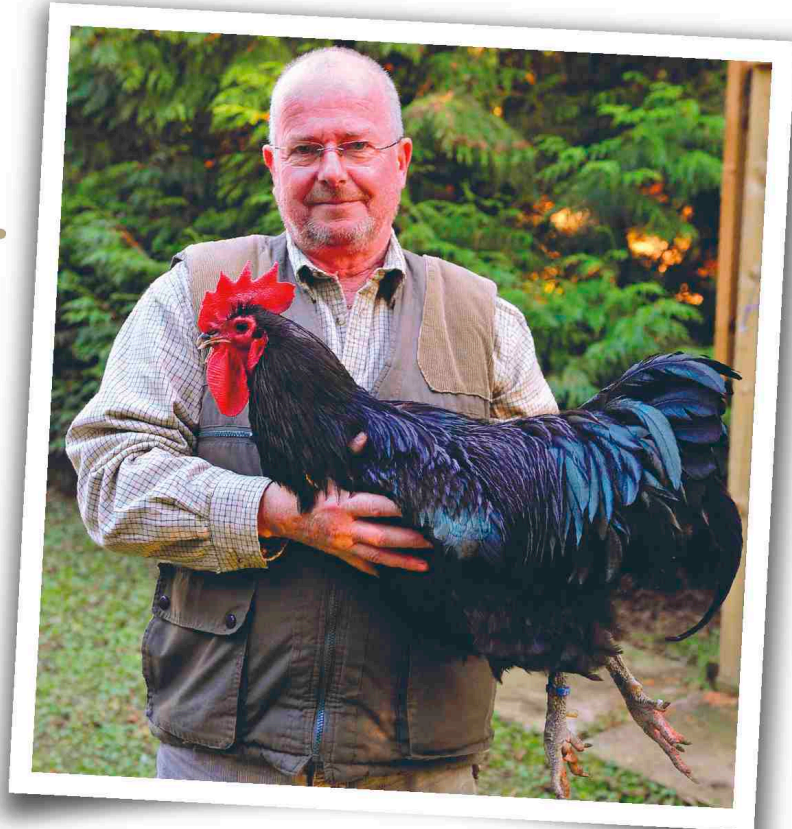
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Me & my birds...

The gentle touch



Mike Evans has spent the past 10 years patiently perfecting his beloved black Australorps, and **Chris Graham** discovers the success this measured approach has brought

Mike Evans with Charlie, one of his first Australorp cockerels that's still working hard in the breeding pens after four years.

All too often chicken enthusiasts fall into the trap of trying to keep too many breeds. They quickly end up with a mishmash of a flock and patchy knowledge of an often random mix of birds.

It's easily done, of course, especially considering the mouth-watering selection of breeds available to the beginner. Visit any decent poultry show and anyone could be forgiven for being

▼ Adapted childrens' playhouses from B&Q were inexpensive to buy and have served Mike well as chicken coops for a number of years.

wowed by the choice of colours, sizes and types available.

However, by far the best long-term strategy, for those serious about progressing in the hobby, is to limit yourself to just one or two breeds, take your time with them and thereby develop a useful, practical understanding of the subtleties and intricacies involved.

Mike Evans is the perfect example of somebody who has done just that.

Early start

Mike's first involvement with chickens came when he was a child, and was unconventional, to say the least! "I come from a family of seven children," he explains, "and, one day when we were all still quite young, I remember the rag and bone man coming round and offering us some day-old chicks. This was just too good an opportunity to miss so, without our parents knowing, we took an old cardigan out to him and each got a chick in return.

"As you might imagine, it didn't go down terribly well with my parents when they discovered that we'd acquired seven chicks, but they let us keep them. I remember that dad made a brooder box with a mesh top that

fitted under the sink in the kitchen.

"All but one of the youngsters grew on well, although they were all males. Once they got to a decent size and started crowing, I remember that dad had a friend who used to come and take one away with him at a time, only for it to mysteriously return a day or two later as an oven-ready bird!

"Those that were left became feisty characters, too, and used to chase my sisters down the garden as they went out to hang the washing on the line; they'd hang on the backs of their dresses!"

Although this introduction to our feathered friends proved a relatively short one for Mike, it obviously made a big impression on him, and he retained a fascination for chickens from that time on. However, no more were to figure in his life until he'd reached his twenties and, as a married man with an allotment, he found himself in a position to re-kindle his poultry interest.

"Plenty of the other allotment holders had poultry and waterfowl of various sorts – hens, geese and ducks – and I remember one even keeping goats. In those days I was keen on showing vegetables, and used to grow enormous carrots and parsnips to



●● I remember the rag and bone man coming round and offering us some day-old chicks.

enter in local competitions. It seemed a logical move to get some chickens as a source of fresh eggs.

Lucky find

"This was about 10 years ago and, in those days, I didn't know anything about the various breeds. But I'd spotted a fellow allotment keeper near me who was keeping some beautiful, black birds. I remember being really taken with those hens and, of course, they turned out to be Australorps. That's how my relationship with the breed began; completely by chance, really.

"My first few birds came from that source and I immediately took to them. Everything went well, I gained experience quickly and was soon breeding my own birds. I bought a few Light Sussex at that time, too, but they never really caught my imagination like the Aussies had. Several years passed and then I decided to try my hand at showing a few birds. But I didn't think that my home-bred birds were anywhere near good enough, so I started looking around for some better stock to buy.

"I saw an advert from a breeder in Scotland who was advertising 'show-quality large Australorps', which sounded ideal. So I got in touch and

▼ Mike has spent plenty of time and money on the construction of his new poultry set; he's been forced to improvise along the way, and has done it impressively.

☛ I saw an advert from a breeder in Scotland who was advertising 'show-quality large Australorps'.

ended up buying seven birds which cost me nearly £400. The deal was done in a car park, and I exchanged the money for a couple of cardboard boxes. I didn't get a good look at the new birds until I got them home and put them in the run.

"Well, to be honest, it was an instant disappointment, and I was immediately struck by the fact that they weren't as good as the birds I already had! However, the breeder seemed to know what he was talking about, so I took him at his word. I remember that one of his parting remarks was that I should enter them in the Scottish National because they were good enough to win!

So, undaunted, I got straight on the phone to the show organisers, ordered a schedule, and duly entered a trio in the Australorp classes. I took them up to Lanark on the Friday evening, having spent a lot of time washing and preparing them as best I could.

"Then, as I was busy penning them, I got chatting with a fellow exhibitor and, once I recounted the story of where my birds had come from, I asked him what

he thought of them. His comments backed up my own impressions, but I left the birds in the show and decided that I'd have a word with the judge afterwards.

"Not surprisingly, they came last in what were admittedly small classes, and the feedback was all negative. But, just for good measure, I consulted Ian and Louise Simpson, from the Australorp Club, and they confirmed everything that had already been said.

Financial setback

"Nobody had heard of the breeder I'd bought the birds from, and the whole experience when from bad to worse when, having decided to get rid of all seven of the birds, they made just £35 at a local sale!"

Despite the setback, Mike remained philosophical about what had happened, and simply chalked it up to experience. He decided then to continue developing and showing his existing stock, and progress that way.

"Even by that stage, I'd made



Me and my birds

☛☛ Don was very impressed, and described them as the best Aussies he'd seen in years!

plenty of new friends thanks to my involvement with the Australorps, one of whom was local poultry judge, Don Storey. I thought it would be useful for him to come round and cast his experienced eye over my birds. As it turned out, this proved to be a wise move as Don was very impressed, and described them as the best Aussies he'd seen in years!

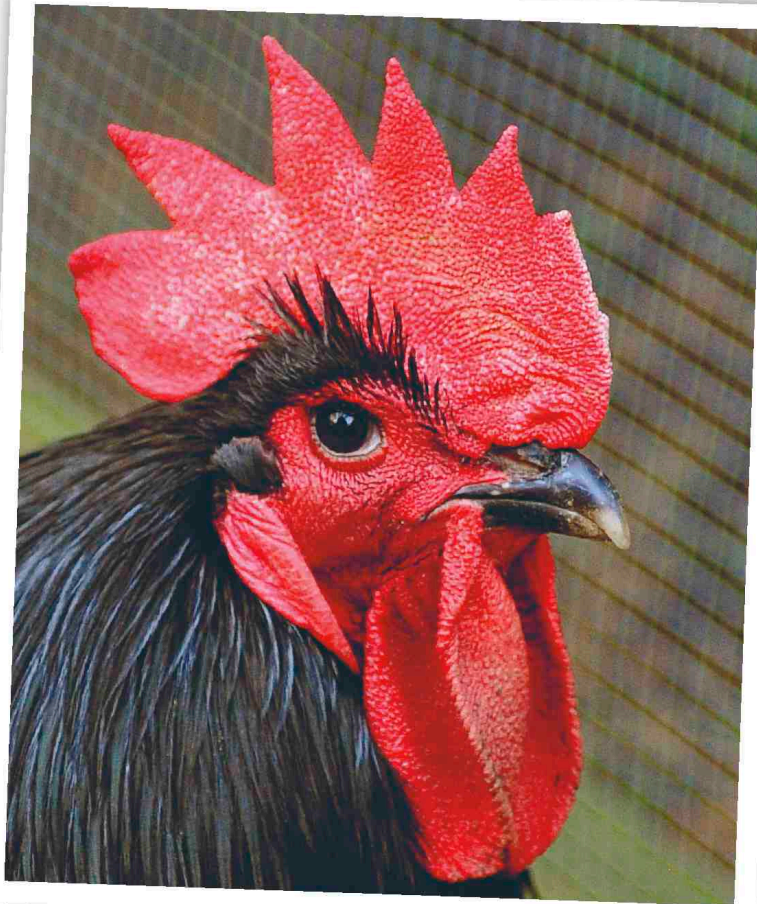
"So that sealed it for me, and I decided to go full steam ahead with showing my home-bred birds. A few months earlier I'd bought a cockerel from Ian Simpson and had been using him carefully to breed with my best females, and the results were looking promising.

"I'd worked hard to become familiar with the important breed standard requirements for the Australorp – details such as white soles to the feet, the importance of a good, dark eye and the need for an evenly serrated comb – and the youngsters that I started producing began ticking all of the boxes.

"Incidentally, I still have that original cockerel, called Henry. He's four years old now, but is still working well for

➤ **Australorp Holy Grail?** One of Mike's promising Aussie males with a very desirable, five-spiked comb.

▼ **I bought some Cream Legbar** hatching eggs to send to a breeder in Cyprus and incubated the few spares I had left to produce two males and two females. I've sold one of the males and am looking forward to some coloured shells from these hens.



me in the breeding pens. One of his decedents is a male called Charlie, who used to like to perch on my shoulder when he was a youngster.

"I started showing with Charlie by entering him as part of a trio, and had some good success. That threesome won Best Trio at the National, Scottish National and the Federation Show, and it was after this success that another friend, Robin Ramus, asked my why I wasn't showing Charlie singly, in his own right?

"My reasoning had been that Charlie had such a lovely nature, and looked so good when paired with a couple of good hens, that it just seemed the right thing to do. However, I took Robin's advice, and began entering him in classes on his own, and he was an almost instant success. He began finding himself up on Championship Row quite regularly, and won several Champion Large Fowl awards at various events.

Crowning glory

"Then, best of all, he won the Large Australorp class at last year's Federation Show. Championship judge Colin Clark then awarded his bird Champion Large Fowl, and best opposite size to the Show Champion, which was one of Robin Creighton's Sebrights. Later in the year, he won Surpeme Champion at the Great Yorkshire Show."

But Mike doesn't only show males, and is pleased and proud to have also had three females up on Championship Row at various shows. There's no doubt that he's really got the showing bug, now!

Although Mike's primary passion remains the black Australorp, he's recently been tempted to get started with the equally eye-catching but very rare, all-black Ayam Cemani. "These birds are few and far between, and I ended up having to buy some hatching eggs from a breeder in York. I tracked them down on eBay, and drove to collect the eggs rather than have them upset in the post.

"Four hatched from the six eggs, but all of them were females, and trying to locate a male was a real struggle. Eventually, I got in touch with the breed registrar in the Rare Poultry Society, and found a male that way. He's not a perfect example, though, so my efforts with this interesting breed remain very much a work in progress.

"The Australorp remains my first love, and I'm working hard now to improve the quality of the combs on my birds. The breed standard requires between four and six, evenly-sized spikes, but most you see at shows tends to have six. I've bred a few with four which look OK but, a few months ago, I set myself the task of producing birds with five-spiked combs. These



seem something of a Holy Grail in the Australorp world, but I've managed to produce a few already that I have high hopes for."

Having spent a very enjoyable is somewhat chilly half an hour touring around Mike's chicken pens, it's clear that he's lavished many hours of hard work – not to mention a good deal of money – on the impressive set-up. He was forced to re-locate earlier in the year due to the development of the land he was originally renting.

However, the new arrangement is nearer to his home and in a wonderful setting on the outskirts of Guisborough. All the runs are now covered with clear, corrugated plastic, and are arranged around a central grassy area that, eventually once all the fencing and gates are in place, will offer some free-range potential for his chickens.

Easy access

Paving slab paths ensure that movement around the unit remains easy and dry, while a clever system of pulleys and wires means that each of the hen house pop holes (that isn't now managed by an auto-lift device), can be raised and lowered without the bother of having to enter each pen in turn.

It's clear that Mike maintains very high standards, as far as the husbandry of his birds is concerned. Despite them being at a remote location, he visits them morning, noon and night, every day, come rain, shine or freezing snow. In fact, it's his proud boast that he's never missed a single visit since he's been keeping chickens.

This degree of attention to detail obviously pays dividends as far as health and welfare is concerned. Mike's birds enjoy rude health and the only problems he's experienced have been picked up from shows. Like so many other keepers, though, he's waged an arduous campaign against red mite, and it's only comparatively recently that he appears to have hit upon a treatment formula that's working for him.

"I've spent a fortune on anti-red mite treatments over the years mostly, I have to say, without much success.

☛☛ This degree of attention to detail obviously pays dividends as far as health and welfare is concerned.

➤ The Cream Legbar male is an impressive-looking bird.



▲ The Aussies are great layers of decent-sized, tinted eggs.

Lately, though, I've settled on a combination of Creocote from the local DIY store – sprayed thoroughly on the inside and outside of my hen houses, twice a year – and diatomaceous earth.

"I sprinkle the latter on the ends of the perches and in the nest boxes and, this year, things have been much better. I realise, though, that with red mite it really is a matter of doing what you can to keep on top of numbers; eradicating these pests completely is all but impossible."

Evidently, Mike doesn't have much time for all the dietary supplements and other tonic-type potions there are on the market nowadays. Instead, he prefers to rely on good organisation and sound practice. "Just about the only additional product I use from time

to time is apple cider vinegar, which I think helps both with digestion and external parasites.

"I give the birds a decent scratch feed every day and they get plenty of fresh apples, too. But their primary diet is Garvo. I used to feed standard growers pellets until I was advised to switch, which I did about three years ago. I really have noticed a difference since, and am convinced that the feathering on my birds is now much improved.

Stockists aren't that widespread up here in the north-east and I now use the excellent Garden Feathers Bird Supplies in Boldon Colliery, Tyne and Wear (tel: 01915 277025, www.gardenfeathers.co.uk). It's a 100-mile round trip that I make once a month but, considering the results I get, I regard it as time and money well spent.

This sort of effort is just typical of the lengths to which Mike is prepared to go to for his birds. It highlights his dedication to their overall wellbeing, and is a credit to desire to do things properly. The Australorps he breeds – and the show success he's enjoyed with them – should be an inspiration to any, would-be pure breed enthusiasts out there; a lesson in the benefits of taking your time, learning the ropes and not biting off more than you can chew! 🐔

Hatching basics

Essential pointers for anyone thinking about hatching some chicks successfully in an incubator this coming spring

Before you start, ask yourself:

- Have I got the best incubator for my needs?
- Am I familiar with the operator instructions?
- Have I tested the machine thoroughly?
- Is the incubator completely clean?
- Is there somewhere suitable to operate it?
- Am I able to look after the chicks once they hatch?
- What will I do with any surplus males produced?

Good eggs?

- Have your hatching eggs been reliably sourced?
- Do you know anything about the parent stock?
- Are they clean, well-shaped, smooth and crack-free?
- For the best results, don't incubate eggs that are more than 7-10 days old
- If possible, collect and transport hatching eggs yourself, rather than relying on the post or a courier.





Egg incubation times:

Chicken	21 days
Duck	28-30 days
Goose	28-30 days
Quail	16-17 days
Pheasant	23-24 days

1 Right incubator?

Modern, fully-automatic incubators are great for the beginner, but not essential. You can save a bit of money by buying a more basic model with less electronic management. However, lower-spec machines will demand more input from the user if successful hatches are to be achieved.

2 Correct settings?

Although plenty of incubators feature handy temperature read-outs nowadays, it's still important to check that the value being displayed actually relates to what's happening inside the machine. Typically 37.8°C is the temperature the machine will need to maintain consistently, and you should use a reliable thermometer to check this for 24 hours or so before starting with any eggs. Do the same with a humidity meter.

3 Clean machine?

An incubator provides the ideal environment for hatching eggs but, unfortunately, also for growing bacteria. Consequently, cleanliness is essential. Even brand new machine should be thoroughly cleaned using a recognised sanitiser. Effective cleaning between egg batches is vital, too.

4 Good view?

A transparent cover is a valuable feature, especially for those with children in the family. If your machine doesn't have one, the temptation to lift the lid and check the eggs can be almost irresistible but, every time this happens, it disturbs the delicate temperature and humidity balance inside, which the incubator is work so hard to maintain.

5 How many eggs?

You can buy incubators that will hatch as few as three eggs or, at the other end of the size scale, those which will handle several hundred and once. Be warned, though, it's all too easy to get carried away and hatch too many!

6 Location, location, location

It's essential that you place the incubator in an environment in which it can work effectively. Ideally it should be in a bedroom or utility room, where the machine's heat controls aren't going to have to battle with the heating and drying effects of central heating. Consistency of environment is the key, so keeping the incubator out of any direct sunshine is another essential requirement for successful hatching.

7 Turning options

The most basic incubators (categorised as 'manual'), have no egg-turning mechanism, so it's the operator's responsibility to carry out this vital, repetitive task by hand. 'Semi-automatic' machines feature an external lever that's used to turn all the eggs at once, but the user still has to remember to do it. An 'automatic' incubator will do it all for you.

My garden hens

Trish Colton recounts some mysterious behaviour and a brief encounter; there's never a dull moment when you keep chickens!

I hate it when my son leans in through the back door and says: "Mum, I think you should come and take a look". It's the phrase he always uses when he thinks something may be wrong with one of the chickens. This time the focus of his concern was Punk.

She was pacing up and down the run and making a long, drawn-out 'bok, bok bok' sound. It was the sort of noise hens make when they're considering laying an egg. Normally, they 'bok' a few times, go quiet while they think things through a bit more, then 'bok' again, and so on.

However, Punk was going on and on and on, non-stop. She looked worried, too. So we picked her up to examine her and she immediately struggled and flapped, trying to get away, which was also odd behaviour for her. Our Araucana bantam is a feisty madam on the ground, but usually relaxes when she's picked up.

We wondered if she had something stuck in her throat, but all seemed well there. We continued the examination, but could find no sign of injury or anything else amiss. But the moment we put her back on the ground, off she went again, pacing and 'bokking'.

This was definitely not normal behaviour, so we decided to bring her inside to see if she would calm down away from the run; we have a large 'hospital cage' which we put in the lounge when needed. But, even when isolated inside, Punk wouldn't eat or drink, and kept right on making the same noise without seeming to stop for breath.

At her normal bedtime we covered the cage and she shut up immediately! I hadn't expected that. The next morning she was absolutely fine and was quiet. But what worried us was that, although she was drinking normally, she wasn't interested in food, so we decided to keep her inside and watch her for another 24 hours.

We tempted her to eat a bit of apple, then some mixed corn and, finally, she condescended to eat her normal food from her dish. The following morning we returned her to the run and she behaved as if nothing had happened. The only conclusion that we could draw from this odd sequence of events was that something had scared her although, whatever it was obviously hadn't bothered the rest of the flock.

Her sister has had a few problems recently too, but hers would be best described as irritants. Whereas Punk likes to take her time getting up in the morning, Rebecca wants to be first out. She likes to ensure she's first to arrive in the run, first to have breakfast from the main bowl and first to sample from all the food cups that are hung around the run. As far as she's concerned, this is The Law.

But things don't always work out according to plan. One morning, both Tu-Tu and Nonami left the coop before her. Unlike Rebecca, they like to stand on the ramp for a moment or two, savouring the day before breakfast. They want to enjoy the aroma of a fresh, winter morning and admire the frost on the field beyond the garden; that sort of thing. But Rebecca has no time for such nonsense, so she jumped over each of them in turn, as if they were dominoes.

Then there was her encounter with our friendly, neighbourhood pheasant. We first made his acquaintance a couple of years ago, when he took over from his dad (we knew his granddad, too). When we're in the outhouse preparing the chickens' breakfast, he marches over, stands in the doorway and



Rebecca, having given our friendly, neighbourhood pheasant a right good glaring at!

demands his share.

Then, when he sees us in the garden each afternoon, he races across the field, leaps on to the wall and gets stuck into the pile of corn he knows will be waiting for him. But he recently decided he needed more, and so jumped down into the garden to join the chickens.

But he came face to face with Rebecca, who glared at him, thought that should be enough to scare him off and turned away. He turned away too, and walked straight into Nonami's path. She was having none of it and flew at him feet first! That was enough for the pheasant, and he retired to the safety of his wall. 🐔

🔴 This was definitely not normal behaviour, so we decided to bring her inside to see if she would calm down.

Trish Colton's book *Mucky Cluckers – Tales from the chicken run* is available at £8.99 + P&P from www.muckycluckers.co.uk and also from Amazon

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Seeing the light

I noted the answer given to the letter regarding light bulbs and frequencies on p44 of the November issue (*PP130, Readers Letters, Hours of interest*), and feel that the advice given is not wholly correct.

In birds (as opposed to mammals) the photoperiod does control reproductive behaviour, with photoreceptors providing zeitgeber generating such response.

While birds have both rods and cones in their retinas (respectively using rhodopsin and four different photopsin complexes as the detector molecules), these are not responsible for ascertainment of day length.

The photoreceptors

governing this are located in the baso-medial hypothalamus, which is found deep within the brain. When enough light penetrates the skull and tissue, the very sensitive photopigment is activated which, in turn, stimulates production of TSH (thyrotropin) from the anterior pituitary gland (I won't bore you with the full details!).

However, in these photoreceptive cells, the transducing pigment is cVA-opsin, which, critically, is most sensitive to wavelengths of ~483nm – the colour of 'true blue' (a meta-analysis of several studies). Thus it is light of blue wavelengths which are responsible for such behaviour, not the whole spectrum of daylight.

When it comes to lighting, LED floods are generally sold as 'warm' or 'cool' white – corresponding to 2,700-3,200K and 5,700-6,500K respectively. Their spectra differ significantly, with 'warm white' producing very little 'blue' frequencies, especially compared to 'cool white'.

Hence it's very important to use 'cool white' LED floods, since warm white will prove ineffective. Standard incandescent bulbs and standard halogens produce very little blue, with cool white fluorescent being a little better. 'Daylight' halides would work well, though not quite as well as the 'cool white' LEDs.

Interestingly, mammals also use cells other than rods and cones, this time using intrinsically photoreceptive

ganglion cells in the retina of the eye. We have three types of photoreceptor in our eyes, not the two (rods and cones) that most believe.

However, these cells have another photopigment, different to rods and cones. In this case, melanopsin but, again, these are optimally responsive to blue light (480nm). This is why lamps used specifically to treat conditions such as Seasonal Affective Disorder, advanced sleep phase syndrome and delayed sleep phase syndrome, are geared to produce blue wavelengths.

My five hens (Marans and Legbars) have been laying five eggs per day, but this has now dropped to four just recently, as one of the Marans has now gone broody, in November!

Giles Osborne, via email

Well, mine fly!

I bought the recent issue of the magazine because it included a feature on the Pekin (*Buying guide, PP130*). Since August I've been the proud owner of five Pekin hens.

I wanted to point out that on p13 you stated that they are not fliers, and that a 1m fence would suffice. I feel this is incorrect and misleading, as ours have all flown high. Some have even managed to clear my daughter's head, and she is 5ft 2in! In fact, I've had their wings clipped now as my fence is only four feet high.

The article was fantastic and informative in all other respects, but I just felt I should contact you as, in particular for new keepers, the flying information is incorrect.

Carmel Fitzgerald, via email

Many thanks for letting us know your



The Pekin bantam; not one of nature's natural fliers.

experiences, Carmel. While every case is different, of course, the Pekin isn't generally recognised as a flier. The detail in our *Buying Guides* is always checked by representatives from the relevant breed clubs. One possible explanation could be that, somewhere down the breeding line, a cross with another breed was introduced that has resulted in your birds being more inclined to fly.

Handling trouble

I have been keeping chickens for 14 years and have had various breeds in that time.

I've hatched out some occasionally, too, and enjoyed a great amount of success with this. My problem is with aggressive hens, (towards me not each other, I should explain).

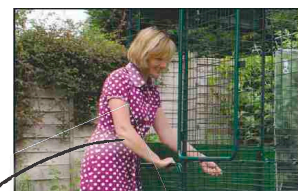
I hatched some eggs out and there was only one pullet which was a Rhode Island Red. She became very aggressive towards me, and delivered some very hard pecks. I eventually gave her away to someone and, thankfully, she seems to be getting on very well in her new home.

I then hatched out four Cream Legbars (pullets) and all was going well, then they started to peck me hard. I try to encourage them to come to me by feeding them wheat from my hand so they get used to me. This seems to happen encouragingly to begin with, but then the aggression starts. Am I doing something wrong?

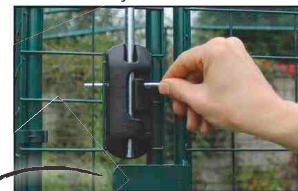
Linda Bradley, via email

We're sorry to hear about the problems you're having with aggressive birds, Linda. It's very unusual for successive generations of different breeds to be aggressive towards their keeper alone, and putting a finger on why this should be is a tricky one. You don't say whether or not you handle your birds. This is a key aspect in the familiarisation process, especially for home-hatched chickens. Handling them on a regular basis, from an early age, is normally the best way to ensure that they are happy and relaxed in your presence. Ed.

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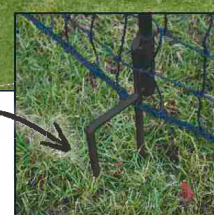
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Bath time!

Paul Donovan explains why it's important to allow your hens plenty of opportunity to dust-bath; it's something they benefit from in so many ways.



All creatures – great or small – clean themselves as part of their natural grooming routine. For chickens, cleanliness is important as it promotes good hygiene, prevents disease, helps control external parasites and keeps their feathers in good, working order.

All birds will spend time each day preening feathers with their beak, but they can't reach everywhere. So, for those inaccessible bits, there's the dust bath.

☛☛ Dust-bathing allows the bird to clean and treat the bits of itself which are otherwise hard to get at.

▲ Chickens will find anywhere to dust bath; even in the middle of a bare patch in the lawn.

Dusty action

Dust-bathing allows the bird to clean and treat the bits of itself which are otherwise hard to get at. It does it by crouching close to the ground, and flapping its wings while wriggling into the dry, powdery material beneath.

This result of all this flapping and wriggling is plumes of fine dust and powder, which is thrown up to settle all over the bather. Then, following a good shake and a ruffle of the feathers, the fine material is encouraged into the feathers, and all the way down to the skin.

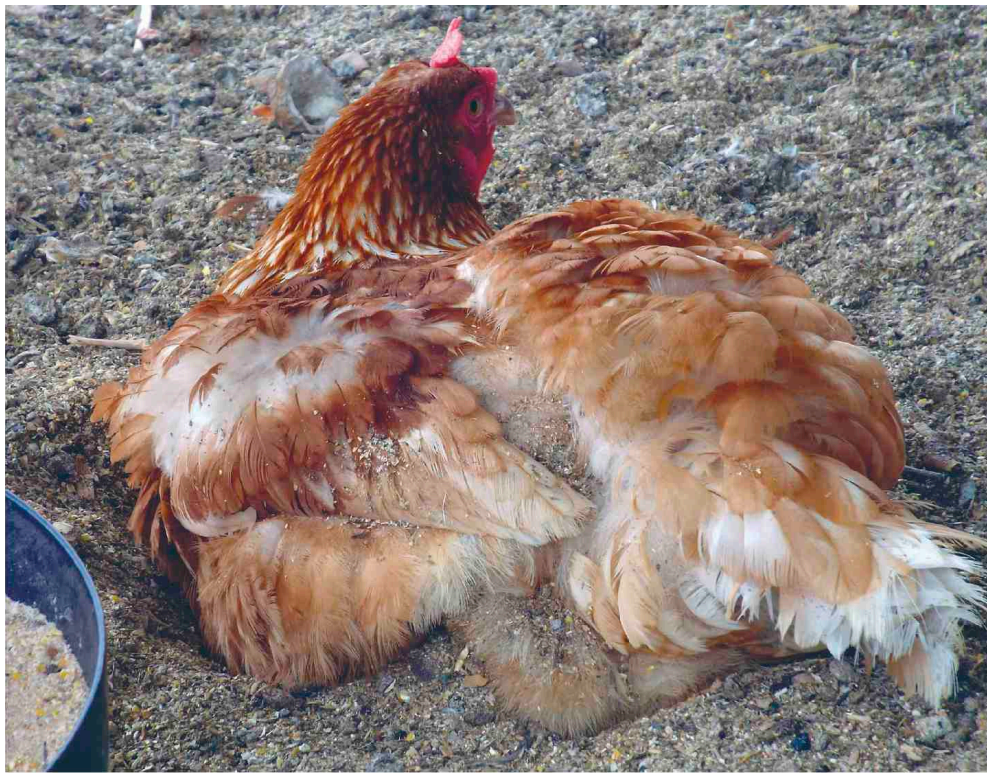
With a few exceptions, most birds have what's called an uropygial gland, known commonly as the oil or preen gland. This is located at the base of the tail, and secretes an oil which the bird

smears over its feathers to help keep them in good condition.

The use of this oil helps keep the plumage flexible and boost insulation and waterproofing performance too. There's also a belief that it helps repel external parasites, such as ticks and mites.

The oil excretions are first picked up on the preening bird's beak, and then transferred to wherever on the body they're needed. It's then spread out and rubbed into the feathers with movements of the head.

Although the gland isn't as well developed in chickens as it is in waterfowl, it does provide the feathers with a glossy, water-shedding ability. Interestingly, the only chicken breed known to lack this gland is the



👁👁 Statistically, hens spend more time preening than their male companions.

Araucana, from South America.

Feathers, of course, are essential to all birds – including chickens – as they perform a number of very important functions. They encase the body in a protective layer which helps regulate temperature during extremes of weather, and provide waterproofing to the skin.

Unlike humans, chickens lack sweat glands, so it's in a bird's interest to look after its feathers. Consequently, grooming is an important activity, and a chicken will spend a good proportion of the day doing it.

Social business

Although hens don't usually preen one another, the behaviour can become a social event during which the birds gather together. Statistically, hens spend more time preening than their male companions.

However, the oil they rub into the feathers deteriorates over time, losing its efficiency, and is continually being replaced. The birds need to find a way of getting rid of the old oil, and they do this by dust-bathing. Once the old oil has been removed, it is replaced with new.

Overall feather condition is governed by a number of factors, including a good diet, providing adequate amounts of vitamins, minerals, protein and amino acids. But good husbandry and

management standards are important too, and failures in this respect will be reflected in poor feather quality.

Dust-bathing among chickens has been studied extensively over the years in various fields of behaviour and, from what's been established, it's clear that young chicks are quick to develop the technique and benefit from it. They begin by flicking bedding on to their feathers, before progressing to laying down in a scratched depression and then rustling their feathers to create a dust cloud.

Although dust bathing can be initiated as a standalone behaviour, it can originate as a consequence of another behaviours. During periods of excessive heat, a chicken will scratch a depression in the ground where the underlying soil is cooler, and then lay in this as a way of cooling itself down. This action can often lead to full-blown dust-bathing.

Dust bathing has also been shown to be a social affair. Where one hen decides to have a bath, others follow suite utilising the same 'bathing' area. This is something I'm acutely aware of with my chickens.

Even when I've had to isolate an individual bird for some reason into a holding area adjoining the main pen, I've seen the separated bird copying the main flock when the others decide to start taking a dust bath.

Time for a bath?

The time of day can also influence the process. My chickens here in Botswana dust-bath between midday and 2pm. This tends to be the hottest time of the day, and is obviously the

period when they try and cool down the most.

Temperatures here can hit 40°C and, even though my chicken house is made entirely from chicken wire with a solid roof for shade, the air can be stiflingly still and oppressive, which makes it bad news for my birds.

In cooler countries, dusting times may vary based on other motivational factors, and it's thought that the circadian rhythm may play an important part in this. The circadian rhythm is the 24-hour cycle in the physiological processes of all living things; it's the built-in clock telling us when we should be awake, asleep etc.

I've also noticed with my chickens, that dust-bathing often follows feeding. The birds will have a good meal, dust-bath, preen themselves and then go to sleep in the depression they have made. They also enjoy pecking at the dust they've scratched out, picking up extra tit-bits of food.

More than a single factor can influence the desire to dust-bath. Aspects such as feather condition, parasite annoyance, the accessibility of appropriate dust-bathing material or the motivation to do it are all important potential triggers.

👁👁 The birds will have a good meal, dust-bath, preen themselves and then go to sleep.

▲ Dust-bathing is a completely natural process for a chicken which appears to soothe both body and soul.

▼ Preening the feathers takes place following dust-bathing.





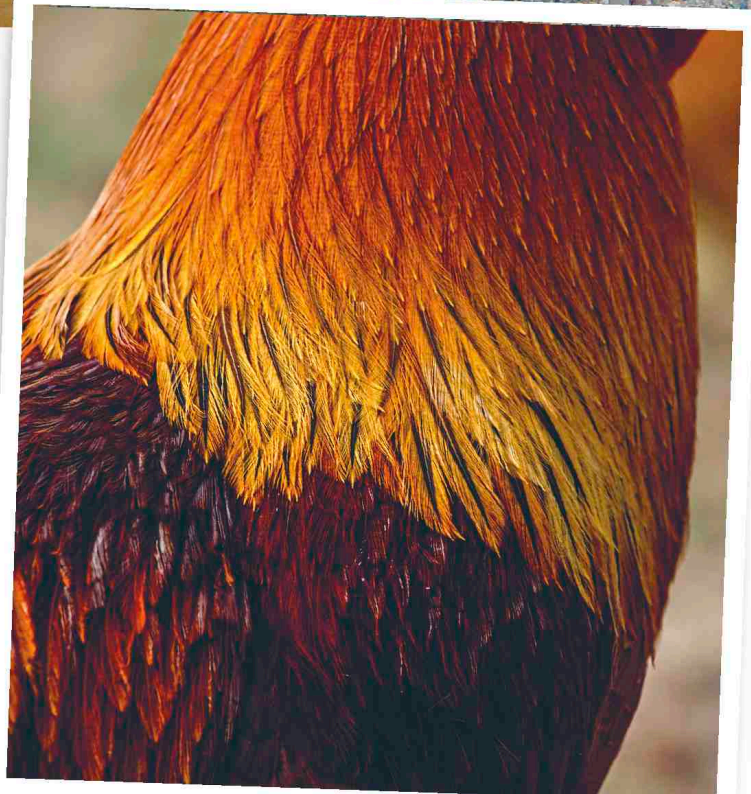
A chicken will dust-bath in just about any substrate available although, given the choice, they'll have preferences. I keep my birds on wood shavings and, although they'll dust bath in it, if I give them sand, they make straight for this and kick up a huge dust storm. I also make use of food-grade diatomaceous earth (DE), which they also favour.

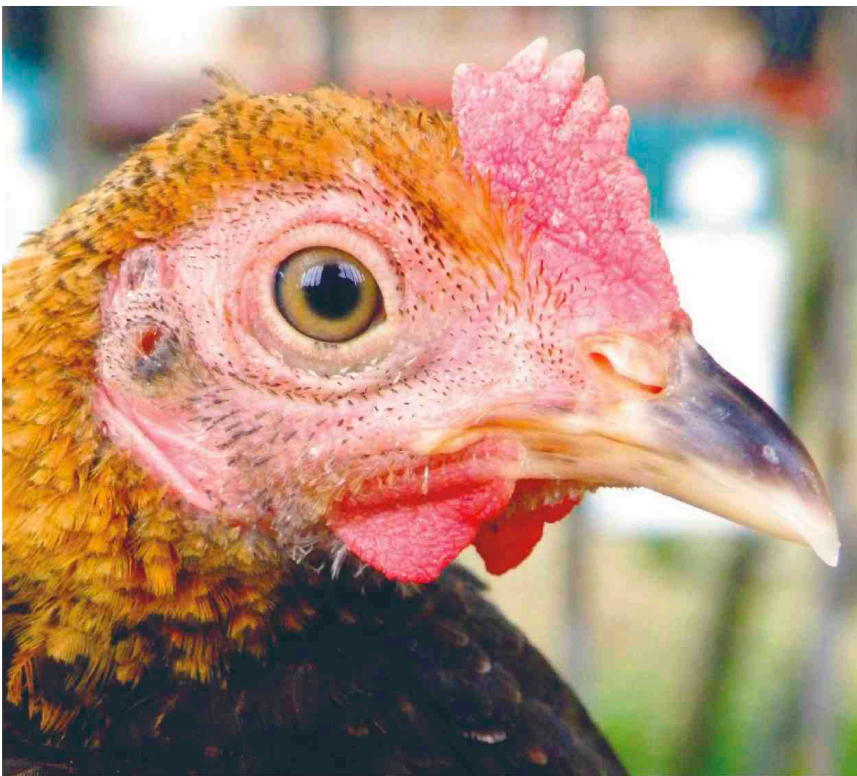
A lot of people are sceptical about DE, but I've found it to be extremely effective at controlling external parasites. I know that some are reluctant to use it for fear of it affecting their birds' respiratory systems. Personally, in all the years I've been using it, I've yet to experience a single problem of this sort.

There are also various 'recipes' that people recommend as being the best dust bath material. Some opt for a single substrate, while others prefer a mix of different media. Based on my experience, plain old builder's sand seems to work as well as anything else.

▲ Chicks are born with soft, fluffy feathers resembling plumules. These will stay until the youngster has its first moult.

► It's the contour feathers that give chickens their outward shape and colour. They consist of a stiff, central shaft and radiating, barbed extensions.





▲ Specialised feathers called bristles are found chiefly around the beak and eyes.

▼ Below the contour feathers you find a soft, velvety layer of plumule feathers.

Natural solution

Other options include wood ash, chemical-free soil and sawdust. However, irrespective of the material used, the underlying purpose of it remains the same; to clean the feathers and to help the bird control external parasite numbers.

If you keep your hens in a free-range environment, I shouldn't worry too much about trying to create a dust bath area for them; in most cases they'll find their own. When I began keeping chickens, the area they selected was a dry patch of earth in the centre of the lawn. This soon became quite large, and I gave up trying to coax them away from it.

When deprived of the ability to dust-bath, many chickens will do what's known as 'sham dust-bathing'. This, as the name suggests, is essentially going through the motions, even though there's no substrate is present.

The birds will scratch at the ground, fluff out their feathers and then 'wriggle' on the surface.

Such behaviour can be seen in intensive rearing situations, or where chickens are maintained in any form of 'unnatural' environment. It goes to show that dust-bathing is an innate behaviour, and not one that's learnt from an adult hen.



Although the birds are going through the motions of dust-bathing, what are they actually gaining from it? Is it psychologically distressing to the bird to be deprived of this natural behaviour, or are

the benefitting simply by going through the motions? Sham dust-bathing is certainly an interesting behaviour that warrants further investigation and study as it could have far-reaching implications for the welfare of those many millions of birds reared in intensive situations. 🐔

👏 If you keep your hens in a free-range environment, I shouldn't worry too much about trying to create a dust bath area for them

Feather types

You could be forgiven for imagining that a feather is a feather, and that's that. In reality, though, there is a good deal more to these essentials of everyday bird life. Essentially, a chicken has five different types of feather, each serving a different purpose.

● Contour feathers

These are the most visible feathers, and give the chicken its outward appearance in terms of shape and colour. They feature a stiff, central shaft from which radiate thin, barbed extensions which lock together with the aid of tiny hooks called barbules. These make up the coloured portion – or blade – of the feather.

As each extension is joined to the next, it gives the feather its shape. The contours are arranged so that they overlap one another, like the tiles on your roof, which provides an effective barrier against water penetrating to the underlying feathers.

Where these extensions come apart, the feather's efficiency is reduced. This is why during preening, a bird will run the feathers through its beak to interlock the barbules together again. Without these barbules holding the extensions together, a bird would also be unable to fly, as it's these which allow the wing to resist the passing of the air.

● Plumule feathers

Below the contour feathers lies a soft, velvety layer of feathers called the plumule feathers. These are smaller feathers that grow from the base of the contours. They have loose-webbed barbs and aren't hooked together. They appear as down, and their function is two-fold. Firstly, they increase insulation during periods of cold weather and, secondly, the chicken can release hot air during warm weather by erecting them. They are essential for effective, body temperature regulation.

● Filoplume feathers

These are tiny, wispy, hair-like feathers which grow in circles around the base of the contour and plumule feathers. They are made up from a thin shaft with just a few short barbules at the tip. Sensory receptors around their base are believed to provide the bird with information about the state of the contour feathers.

● Juvenile feathers

When it hatches, a chick is covered in soft, fluffy feathers which resemble plumules. These will remain until the chick experiences its first moult, at which point they are replaced by juvenile feathers that resemble contour feathers, but have a softer texture. Over successive moults, the different types of feathers begin to develop.

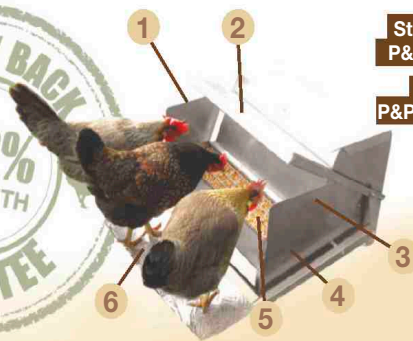
● Bristles

These are highly specialised feathers that are typically found on the head and neck (notably around the beak and eyes), and they are believed to have a sensory function. They feature stiff, tapered shafts with just a few barbs. It's thought that those around the eye area may serve a similar role as to the eyelashes found on mammals, and help protect the eyes.

➔ Contact Paul

If you'd like to get in touch with Paul Donovan to discuss any aspects raised in this article, then he can be reached by sending an email to: paul.plantdoctor@gmail.com

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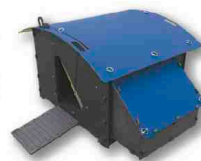


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National nostalgia

Fred Hams revels in another National Poultry Show but, despite the new venue, discovers that many of the old questions remain the same.

I've been attending our national poultry shows right from the start. I was at the first Poultry Club National, in Nottingham, helping to launch the then newly-formed Rare (poultry) Breeds Society, then at the first of Alexandra Palace Nationals.

However, then as now, for those entering the world of poultry exhibiting, little has much to do with genetic conservation or genotype survival. Rather, by and large, it's individuals or groups dedicated to presenting examples of strains carefully honed to demonstrate the latest exhibition interpretation of a breed's written standard of excellence. What's more, to best demonstrate these exhibition features, show preparation will be as important as strain provenance.

Early interest

It would have been at that the first National, when noting my interest in the red-saddled Yokohama, an old-time exhibitor assured me that they were no use 'other than for making pyle Leghorns'. Later I was to find that these RSYs were made in Europe in the 1880s, by crossing two or more possibly now extinct, native Japanese, long-tailed breeds. This happened just as, 40 years earlier, the Cochin was created out of several disparate, indigenous Asiatic fowl populations.

In fact, walk around at the National – or any other good poultry show – and you're likely to hear established exhibitors talking about how they 'made' a new colour variety, or even 'remade' a long lost breed. As far as genetic conservation is concerned, 'breed' is a somewhat blurred concept, that will be further confused as we realise that just about all (with one or two possible

➤ Judge-watching at major shows is always interesting. Here Mike Hatcher is sorting through the Pekins. He's been on the scene long enough to be able to navigate the difficult path between the Pekins standardised here as True bantams, and the imported Cochin bantam strains that now influence many breeding pens.



exceptions) of our much-loved, old utility breeds evolved from 19th century crosses.

Yet, after a period when small-scale poultry keeping had almost died out, that first Poultry Club National heralded a time of expansion for this important sector of the hobby. Happily, this growth has continued, with a few setbacks along the way, ever since. However, the links between the estimated 500,000+ UK households said to be involved with domestic chicken keeping, and the exhibition world remain tenuous.

Of course, the idea of genetic conservation will still resonate among many small-scale chicken keepers. Having perhaps seen the light in terms of the way the pure-bred industry was heading and, having moved sideways into commercial pig production, the domestic utility and conservation of many of the threatened utility poultry strains had its attractions for me.

However, it soon became obvious that, rather than act as a mainline genetic conservation body, the principle role of the newly-formed Rare Breed Society would be to act

☞ The idea of genetic conservation will still resonate among many small-scale chicken keepers.



National nostalgia

☞ The Fancy could only be properly administered within a strong and united-of-purpose, national poultry club.

within the poultry and Poultry Club exhibition network, simply as an albeit temporary 'breed' club for a then ever-increasing number of breeds too weak to maintain their own support networks.

Swept-along

Even if this was somewhat at odds with my conservation ideas, I soon found myself caught up with the mission concept of an enthusiastic group headed by the late A Rex Woods (the first RBS president), and including a number of conservation/exhibition, largely Malpas show-based enthusiasts who were then the vanguard of the new revival of poultry for exhibiting.

As a committee member, I was struck by the wide conservation remit the Rare Breed Society had found itself with. My early concern had primarily been with the dire straits of the newly-redundant utility strains of yesterday's main line 'working' breeds. Others, like Rex, thought that we had to concern

➤ Show results in multi-variety breeds like the Hamburgh, that have the most complex of colour patterns, are usually dominated by a small group of breeders who fully understand their finer points. Moving outside of this group often sees a senior panel judge relying on their wider experience to find the best bird on the day. Here's Panel A judge David Sill among the silver-spangleds at this year's National.



ourselves with the plight of any established breeds no longer able to support their own breed club. But he had, by that time, managed to import several previously unknown breeds.

The first RBS secretary Andrew Sheppy's edict was that our role should be 'the support any breed with a history within the British Fancy'. In spite of having spent my working life within the utility fold, the latter rang a bell with me. I found and looked at the wonderful illustrations by Harrison Weir in my much-loved copy of *Tegetmeier's Illustrated Poultry*, and was soon importing hatching eggs of long-lost breeds like the white-faced Spanish and the equally dramatic, devil-horned La Fleche.

The point is that, in spite of

differing conservation ethae and ethical approaches of all those involved, at that time we were both willing to work together and recognised that the conservation movement's best and possibly only hope would be within the poultry Fancy. It was also clear to us that the Fancy could only be properly administered within a strong and united-of-purpose, national poultry club.

Then, thanks to the endless enthusiasm of the late Will Parr and his newly-formed Southern Counties group, some redundant poultry houses and a mill that was churning out several tons of feed a week, there was little to stop me taking on several of the rarer breeds. Together with several Southern Counties branch members, I found myself

◀ Being both a Panel A judge and a regular Faverolles exhibitor, Ian Sissons knows plenty about the breed. Here he's searching for the essential, correct undercolour in the important salmon variety.

working through the night to stage the first Alexandra Palace National.

Winning five firsts in the 'Rare' classes, and going on help to start Kent Poultry Fanciers, probably helped to see me first follow Rex as the second president and then chair of the, by then, Rare Poultry Club. This then led to me being later elected – again after some prompting by Rex – a member of the Poultry Club council.

Youthful optimism

I remember in those days there being a palpable degree of youthful optimism in the air. While there were probably far fewer people keeping fowl as hobby then than now, I think the fact that so many joining poultry clubs having a background in domestic poultry, gave a greater stability to the exhibition scene than we have today.

Interestingly, a practical measure of this was that a far greater percentage of those small-scale keepers and breeders were members of the national Poultry

Club. Significantly, in those days, I was also aware of a much more realistic grasp of the important need to work together for the good of the Fancy, among all the members.

Things moved on though and, with the arrival of a proper, full-time job within an Environmental Health department and the responsibilities of running a small farm, I decided that losing full days at meetings in London was no longer an option. However, by the time I left Council, this unity of purpose was already being challenged by internal dissent and, dare I say it, in some cases compromised by personal egos and ambition.

Luckily, thanks in part to early retirement, along with running a now hobby farm, I've managed to find time over the intervening years to judge at the National Poultry Show more times than anyone else. There have also been countless engagements at both major European shows and UK county events and local shows. It's against

▼ The constantly busy HEKA Incubators UK stand provided an excellent point of contact for me and my *Practical Poultry* friends at this year's National. It was a show that seemed to lack a real focal point, but I was glad to spend time with David Campbell and his many customers.

this background that I found myself, this time, with the luxury of being a simple spectator, again visiting our National show.

The new venue, further from home and along ever-more congested motorways, has far more open space and will, given time, probably 'bed-in'. But a layout that seemed to lack a focal point found me and several others spending that much longer finding the sort of old friends that one usually relies on meeting up with at these set-piece events.

Or it could be that the march of time, combined with a changing and expanding Fancy, sees one recognise a smaller percentage of exhibitors? But in this context, it was good to get a glimpse of Jim Young still involved – one of the last of the old, Alexandra Palace gang.

In demand

What was surprising, at this, the heartland of the exhibition scene, was just how many folks – nearly all totally unknown to me, but in most cases middle-aged – sought me out to tell me how much they enjoy and value my contributions to this magazine on the more utility aspects of poultry keeping and breeding.

Even more surprising was being

☯☯ In those days, I was also aware of a much more realistic grasp of the important need to work together.



National nostalgia

asked by pretty young ladies to stand close to them while they took photos of us both. My pal Derick informs me that this new phenomena is known as a 'selfie'.

On a more serious – but equally gratifying – note, I was delighted to run into my old friend 'Alex', from an important, Moscow-based poultry breeding institute. He's hatched eggs from my old strain of utility Sussex, way back in early 2012.

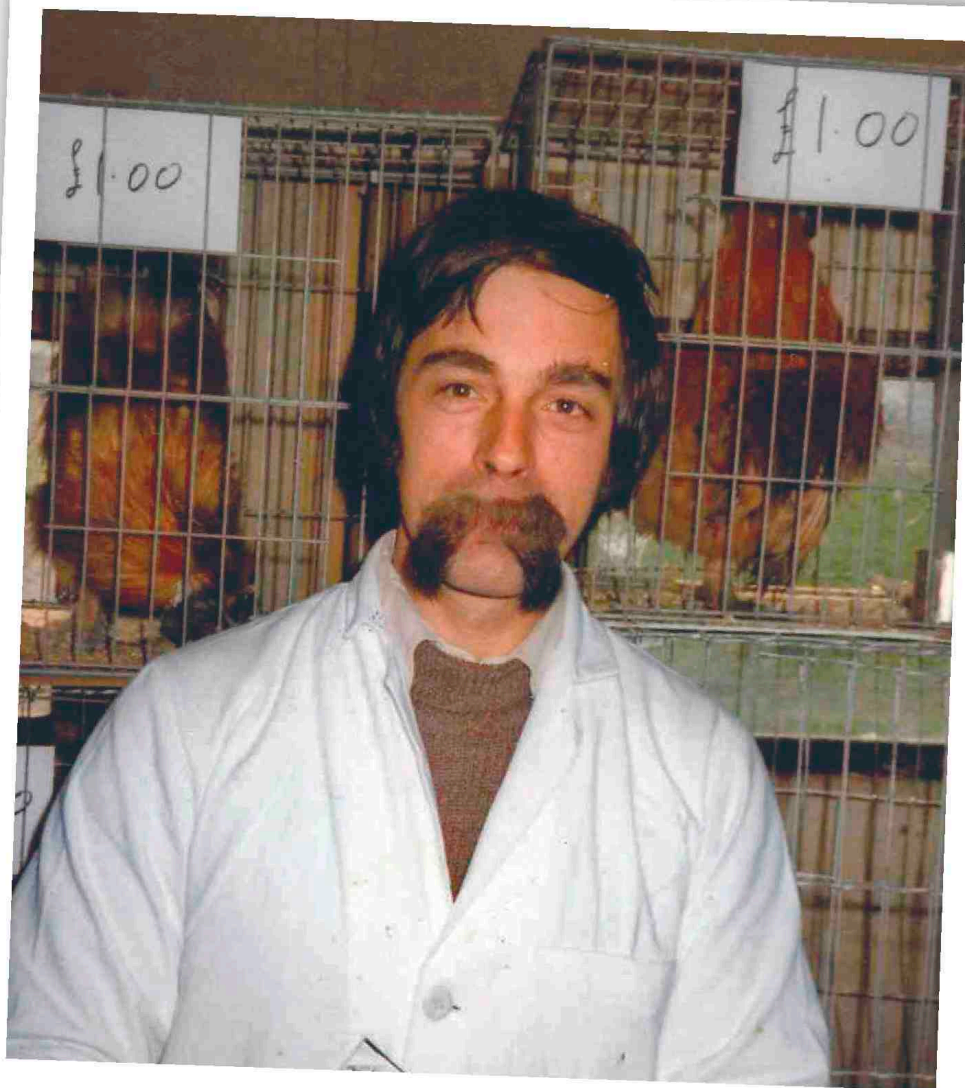
The original 14 chicks (out 16 eggs) have expanded to close on 200 birds now, and the more mature of these are putting up some pretty impressive (for a table strain) laying performance of over 200 eggs in their pullet year. Alex has promised to send on comparative results which will be interesting, and it's great to still feel part of the action, albeit somewhat at arm's length in this case!

Watching judges at these major shows remains an interesting, near-obsession for me. I have, in the past, received support from readers for comparing our rather add-hock system with the more prescribed, continental grading system. Certainly the year-long correspondence course (that contains an element on 'sound breeding') before one can even sit a judging test on the continent, has much to commend it.

Our system sees specialised classes like Hamburgs either judged by one of that very select breed's keepers (with a deep understanding of the centuries'-old intricacies involved) and who tend to do most of the winning, or presided over by senior panel judges from outside the 'magic circle' who often have to rely on the basics of sound judgment. Other breeds enjoying wider support usually have a pool of judges who bring with them the support of the majority of exhibitors.

But the increase in hobby-poultry interest that comes close to matching the 'poultry mania' of the 1850s, has brought its own problems. Some people are willing to charge newcomers far too much for often inferior birds. The advent of the dealer/breeder/exhibitor has brought a new and, I think, quite

☞ Some of the newcomers seem too ready to take judges' decisions far too personally.



▲ I only caught a fleeting glimpse of Jim Young, who was as chief livestock steward and very much in working mode at this year's National. But it was great to see him there and it took me back to when this photo was taken at the first Alexandra Palace show. Sale pen prices and moustache styles may have changed, but I'm delighted to report that Jim remains one of the worker bees of the poultry world!

unnecessarily harsh edge, with new exhibitors not understanding that different judges at different shows will see their prized bird in different lights.

Useful return

Yet, on the positive side, the many owners with well-bred stock now find their birds at last command a good price and are, therefore, able to follow sound breeding practice and get a fair recompense for their efforts.

My old friend David Campbell, who has given more thought to both poultry genetics and incubation than most, was kind enough to offer me a really comfortable chair on his busy, HEKA incubator stand. These top-of-the-range machines will necessarily cost more than some others but, talking to past and would-be customers, there's a growing understanding that achieving a fair hatch rate means that one can both breed more from one's best hens and hatch at the optimum time of the year – essential tools in sound breeding. Little wonder that David sold every machine on his stand!

Sadly, the new expansion in exhibiting and shows seems, in some quarters, to have brought with it a rather less pleasant edge. Possibly, and perhaps they meet up too regularly, some of the newcomers seem too ready to take judges' decisions far too personally. I think we need to return to the ethos that exhibiting a good bird in perfect condition should only be seen as an opportunity to compete with an exacting, dedicated standard, rather than score points off fellow fanciers.

Certainly to use the internet to share and spread dissent can do nothing but harm the companionship that used to be a part of the exhibition circuit. Worse still, using the verbal incontinence of websites can do untold damage to the elected bodies that should be totally engaged in promoting the wellbeing of the Fancy, and the birds that it looks after.

Thank goodness those who are far happier seeing well-bred, and in some cases useful, chickens developing in a home environment have a magazine like this one to help share our common interest. 🐦



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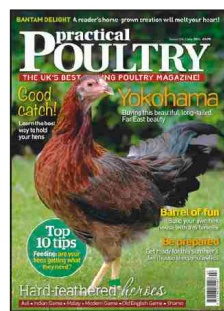
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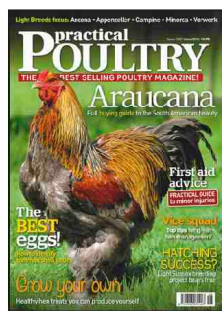
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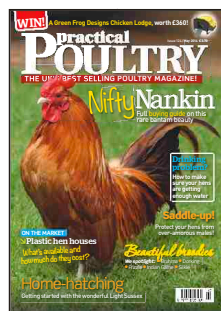
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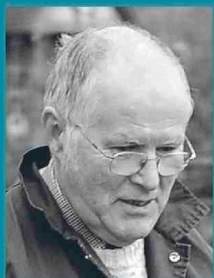
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Basic first-aid

Experienced poultry vet and lecturer, **David Parsons**, advises on recognising and dealing with the sort of minor injuries that back-garden chickens commonly encounter.



The ability to carry out a basic level of first-aid is an important skill that all chicken keepers need to develop, regardless of the number of birds being kept.

The key, of course, is knowing whether or not first-aid is required in the first place and, to make this decision, you must have the ability to recognise and accurately assess whatever problem presents itself. the problem in the first place.

▲ Chickens have an amazing ability to carry on 'as normal' despite quite serious-looking wounds like this one. So keepers must always remain vigilant, have a first-aid kit to hand and be ready to deal effectively with issues such as this.

☞ Most minor problems affecting back garden chickens are, in fact, caused by environmental issues.

Sooner or later

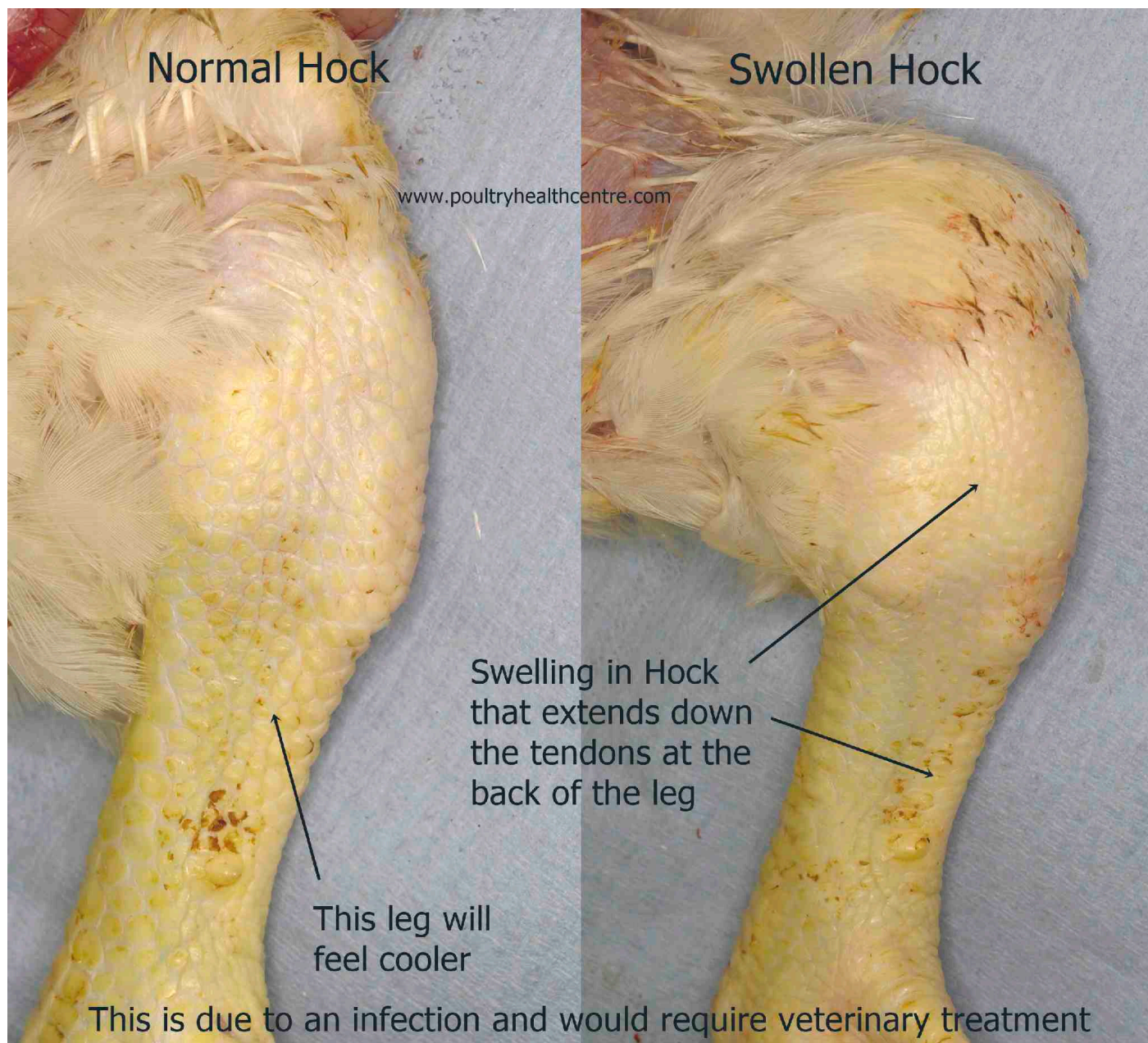
While nobody – especially those new to the chicken-keeping hobby – likes to contemplate the possibility that things might go wrong, the reality is that, sooner or later, they will. Whether you've got three hens, a mixed flock of 30 birds or a serious laying operation with 300 hybrids, small problems affecting one or more of your birds are bound to arise every now and then.

In the same way that we suffer from cuts, sprains and bumps, you can expect similar, small problems to occur among your chickens. However, the decision about whether or not the problem is simply a basic

issue problem that requires no further action, or something more serious requiring the input of a vet, will depend on how well you know your birds.

In my experience, the impression I get is that most minor problems affecting back garden chickens are, in fact, caused by environmental issues; be that either deficiencies in housing or failures on the management and/or good husbandry front.

The problem is that there are so many ways that a chicken can hurt itself as it goes about its daily business, especially if it's able to free range. But getting the basics



right with regard to the hen house and run will go a long way to minimising the risk of problems.

Attention to detail plays a big part. For example, how smooth are the perches used by your birds? If there's any chance of them picking up a splinter as they hop up to roost at night, then that can be the cause of a potentially serious problem. Sharp splinters of wood can easily cause a puncture wound in the footpad which, in turn, has the potential to develop into a painful and debilitating condition known as bumble foot.

Also, how firm are the perches inside your hen house. Those which don't fit their brackets terribly well can move enough to cause pinching of the toes and, not only is this painful, it can also cause the loss of a toenail. This might not sound like much of an issue but it can cause a bleed which, in turn, can lead to unwanted pecking attention from

other birds in the flock.

So a key aspect of basic first-aid, therefore, requires that we carefully observe the birds in the first instance, so that issues can be spotted with the minimum of delay and the appropriate measures taken.

Then, having seen to the immediate welfare of the bird in question, it's very important not to ignore or overlook the reason why the problem occurred in the first place. Dealing effectively with the cause is another fundamental requirement, to prevent similar instances happening again and again.

What's the matter?

Observation is absolutely critical! When you only have a few hens this should be relatively straightforward, and should become part of your daily, husbandry routine. When you let your birds out in the morning,

always spend a few moments simply watching how they behave.

Notice if one hangs back from the rest, or is slow leaving the house. More obviously, signs of blood on any of the birds, or dropped around the hen house or run, should set the alarm bells ringing.

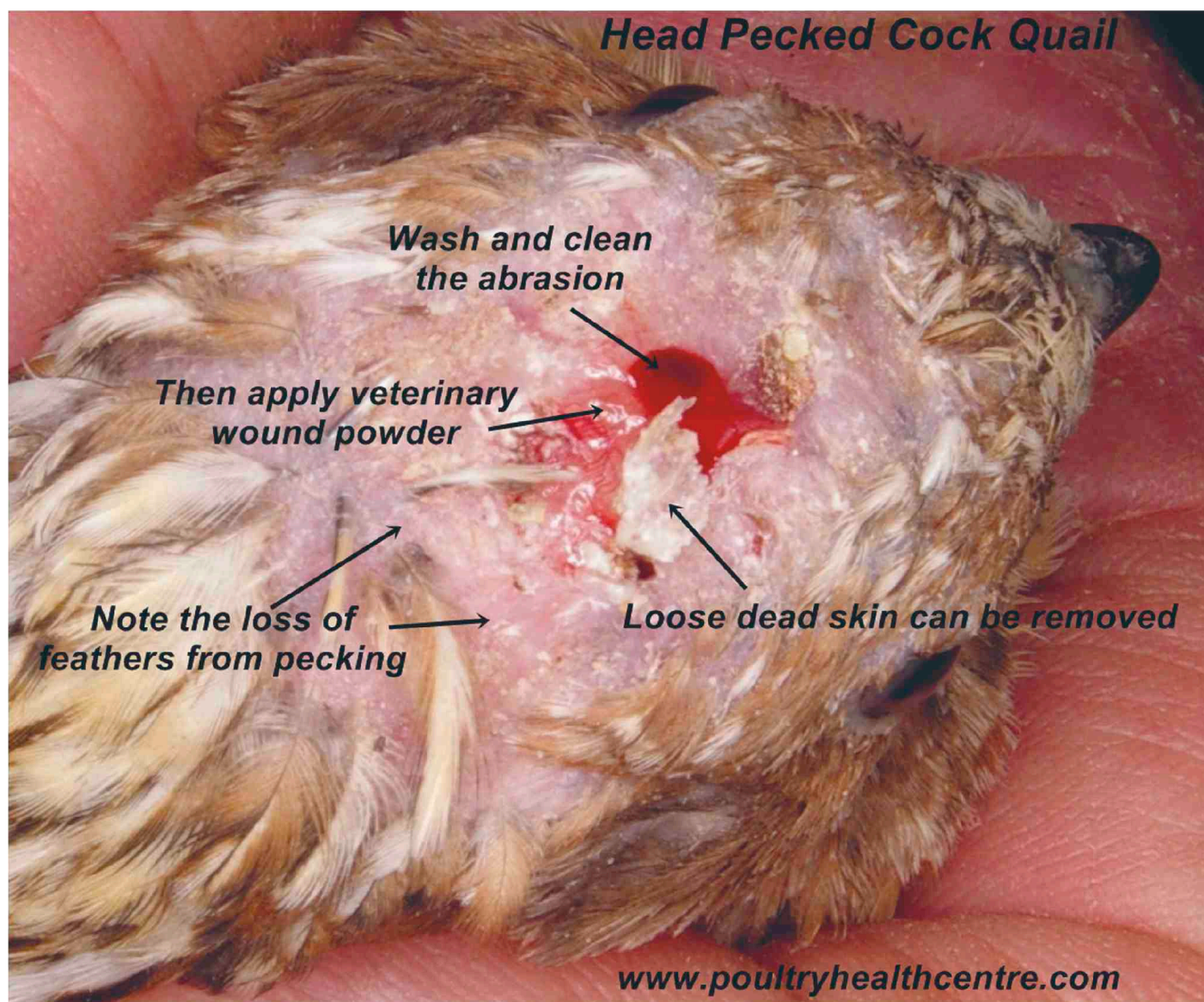
When dealing with 30 or more hens, keepers will need to be quite

Appropriate action

When dealing with an injured chicken, stay calm and quiet, keep your movements slow and deliberate. A primary objective is to minimise stress levels for the bird, and the way it's handled plays a big part in this. As a general course of action, follow these simple steps:

1. Identify the affected area
2. Clean the affected area
3. Stop any bleeding and apply an antiseptic as appropriate
4. Place the bird in a quiet area with food and water





astute to keep tabs on all the birds, and it's even more important to have a good working knowledge of how your birds behave under normal circumstances. It's only with this knowledge that you'll be able to notice abnormalities.

You are looking for the odd movement, the bird that always seems to go around you in one direction only, one that's reluctant to move or does not go to the feeders and drinkers as rapidly as the others after being let out.

Problems will be more obvious, of course, the more serious the damage. So a flap of skin on the back of the head, or feathers missing from the tail should be easy to spot. Sometimes you might also see what might best be described

“ I'm continually amazed to see how birds cope with problems that would put you or me in hospital.

as excessive preening with self-mutilation.

As always, it's necessary to catch the offending bird and give them a thorough examination. At this point perhaps one of the easiest guides as to whether this is going to be simple and basic first-aid problem, or perhaps a more serious condition, can be gauged from how easy it is for you to catch the patient.

You may see a bird that is looking a little poorly and then, as soon as you make a move to catch it, it'll head for the hills as quickly as it can manage. Do not forget that your birds will do everything in their power to give you the impression that there is nothing wrong with them. So those which are suspiciously easy to get hold of may well be suffering quite badly.

Having caught the bird that may have a minor problem, there's always a tendency to go straight to the problem area that first attracted

your attention. If it was limping a little, you may start by looking at the offending leg or, if there is pecking damage or a bit of fresh blood on view, then you might start hunting for that.

However, my recommendation is always to carry out a thorough and methodical thorough examination of the whole bird, starting from the head and working down towards the feet. This is the best approach and should ensure that you don't miss anything important.

Basic problems?

I'm continually amazed to see how birds cope with problems that would put you or me in hospital. It may be that chickens have a higher pain threshold than we do; nobody really knows. However, some of the problems that I've seen birds taking in their stride, have been nothing short of astonishing. And, as for the sort of everyday scrapes

TIPS AND ADVICE

- Spotting a problem early can prevent many serious consequences.
- Ideally in your first-aid kit you should contain something to clean any wounds and an antiseptic wound powder and haemostatic products to stop any bleeding.
- You will need to have somewhere quiet with food and water to put the affected bird to give it a chance to recover. This is particularly important if over-mating if the problem.
- In all cases if your bird does not seem to be improving after 2 to 3 days then you should take it to the vet.

and bumps that would have many of us rushing for the doctors well, problems like that don't seem to even register on the average chicken's scale of discomfort!

It is not unusual for birds to pull a toenail, suffer from comb and wattle damage – either as a result of inter-flock pecking, fighting or getting caught in fencing or feeders – or suffer a bramble or thorn scratch. The blood on the floor could simply be the result of a damaged toenail or it might be something more serious. Prompt and accurate assessment is essential.

Once you've identified the problem, reach for your first aid kit and start putting things right. The first job will be to carefully clean the wound with water and cotton wool. This will enable you to see just how severe the damage is.

If the wound is still bleeding, then perhaps the application of pressure to the affected area for a few minutes will be sufficient to stop it. Alternatively, you may use a styptic pencil or haemostatic powder. Of course, every case will be different and what you have to do will largely be determined by the severity of the injury.

You may find yourself faced with a flap of skin – perhaps as a result of mating damage – on the back of the hen's head. You may even be able to see the skull. However, such things aren't beyond the limits of a careful, DIY approach. This kind of damage can be effectively treated at home with gentle cleaning using cotton wool and water, followed by the application of veterinary wound powder. Alternatively you can use 'the purple spray' or Stockholm tar.

After the initial treatment you should always isolate the bird for its own safety. It should be placed in a quiet area that's away from the sight of the rest of the flock, and don't forget to provide a convenient

source of both food and fresh, clean drinking water. If you feel it's necessary, it might also be advantageous and comforting to provide a little additional warmth, using a heat lamp, but don't overdo this.

Then, once you're happy that the injured bird is safe and comfortable, turn your mind to the likely cause of the problem and deal with that as best you can.


If the bird seems to be irritable and continually pulling at feathers, this can result in self-inflicted damage which can then become secondarily infected with bacteria. Clean-up the affected area and apply an antiseptic. Have a good look to make sure that you don't have either a mite or lice problem. If the latter are present, then you will need to treat the mites and lice as well as cleaning up than any damaged areas.

Lameness problems require a thorough examination of the toes and joints of the legs and wings. Check to see that the limbs are as straight as they should be, and that the wings are being held in a normal position.

Carefully feel and make sure that there are no swellings or heat in the joints or tendons. Your birds can suffer from twisted ankles and sprains just the same as we can. It may be that the bird got caught up in some string that was left lying around, in the fencing or trapped between some equipment somewhere.

If you find a bird that is obviously lame but you can't locate any swellings or heat in the joints, then the simplest thing would be to put the bird in a quiet area on its own with food and water (and heat if the weather is very cold), then wait and see what happens.

Also, when investigating leg issues, don't forget the possibility of scaly leg mite activity. Check carefully for raised scales (they should all be flat and tight-fitting on a healthy young bird) and signs of crusty deposits. If you find this is a problem, then you'll have to treat it separately with an appropriate product (consult your vet if necessary for additional advice).

Regrettably, there will be occasions when you don't notice that there's anything particularly wrong with a bird for some little while after the initial injury has been sustained. Pecking damage is probably the most likely cause of these sorts of problems, particularly if it happens to be near or around the eye. As a consequence, the bird may lose the sight in the affected eye but, otherwise, should be perfectly fine. 

First-aid kit

A basic first-aid kit should contain the following:

1. A handful of cotton wool in a small plastic bag or freezer bag
 2. Half a dozen or so sheets of paper towel again wrapped in a plastic bag
 3. A pair of sharp scissors
 4. Two pairs of disposable gloves
 5. A small container of hand sanitiser
 6. 3 cotton buds wrapped in cling film
 7. The container could be used to hold the warm water necessary for cleaning
 8. Products to stop the bleeding – styptic pencil or haemostatic powder
 9. Veterinary wound powder or Savlon
- Stockholm tar or 'the purple spray' are best kept separately.



Poultry Health Centre

David Parsons is currently developing the Poultry Health Centre website; an online resource intended to provide a wealth of essential, health-related information on chickens, turkeys, ducks, pigeons, pheasants, partridge or avians in general. You can find out more by visiting: www.poultryhealthcentre.com



Poultry-friendly vets

This directory contains the contact details of vets recommended by *PP* readers, and practices specialising in poultry.

THE NORTH

Ark Veterinary Surgery
Mobberley, Cheshire
T: 01565 872 035

The Minster Veterinary Practice
York, Yorks.
T: 01904 620968
www.minstervets.co.uk

Robson & Prescott
Morpeth, Northumberland
T: 01670 512275

Sandhill Veterinary Services
Thirsk, N Yorks
T: 01845 578710
www.sandhillvet.demon.co.uk

CENTRAL ENGLAND
Amicus Veterinary Centre
Solihull, W Mids.
T: 0121 7331439

Arnold & Carlton Veterinary Centre Ltd
Nottingham
T: 0115 940 34000
www.merialvetsite.com/sites/arnoldandcarlton/home.html

Avonvale Veterinary Centre
Kenilworth, Warks.
T: 01926 854181

Beech House
Towcester, Northants.
T: 01327 354477

Bicester Vets
Bicester, Oxon
T: 01869 252077 (24 hour)
www.bicestervets.co.uk
contact@bicestervets.co.uk

Blue House Veterinary Centre
Biddulph, Staffs.
T: 01782 522100
www.bluehousevets.com

Companion Veterinary Clinic
Newark, Notts.
T: 01636 707636

Hillman Veterinary Centre Ltd
6 practices, W. Midlands
T: 01922 622280
www.hillmanvets.co.uk

The Jamieson Veterinary Group
Ilkeston, Derbys.
T: 01559 329322

The Minster Veterinary Practice
Sutton Bonington, Loughborough
T: 01159 516551
www.minstervets.co.uk

Radnor Courts Veterinary Practice
Cambridge
T: 01223 249331

EASTERN ENGLAND
Isle Veterinary Group
Ely, Cambs. T: 01353 658333
www.islevetgroup.co.uk

Mill House Veterinary Surgery & Hospital
King's Lynn, Norfolk
T: 01553 771457
www.millhousevets.co.uk

Stephen Lister
Attleborough, Norfolk
T: 01953 455454

Retford Poultry Practice
Retford, Notts.
T: 01777 703011
www.retfordpoultry.co.uk

Slate Hall Veterinary Practice
Willingham, Cambs.
T: 01954 262460

Westover Veterinary Centre
N Walsham, Norfolk
T: 01692 407040

THE SOUTH EAST
Animal House Veterinary Services
Deal, Kent T: 01304 379533
Herne Bay, Kent T: 01227 374858 www.ahvs.co.uk

Arthur Lodge Veterinary Surgery
Horsham, West Sussex
T: 01403 25296

Ashbarn Veterinary Surgery
Ockley, Surrey
T: 01306 713177

Robin Creighton
Braintree, Essex
T: 01376 325511
Coggeshall T: 01376 561667

Crown Veterinary Clinic
Redhill, Surrey T: 01737 822250
http://sites.google.com/site/crownvetswebsite

Downslink Veterinary Surgery
Southwater, West Sussex
T: 01403 732219

Hunter's Lodge Veterinary Practice
Ewhurst, Surrey
T: 01483 276464 Guildford, Surrey T: 01483 570782

The Minster Veterinary Practice
Leominster
Tel: 01568 610343
www.minstervets.co.uk

Nine Lives Veterinary Centre
Redbourn, Herts.
T: 01582 793636
www.ninelivesvets.co.uk

Pierson Stewart and Partners
Cranbrook, Kent
01580 713381

Putlands Veterinary Surgery
Paddock Wood, Kent
T: 01892 835456
post@putlandsvets.com

Seers Croft Veterinary Surgery
Faygate, Surrey
T: 01293 851122

Senlac Veterinary Centre
Battle, E. Sussex
T: 01424 777321

South Downs Veterinary Consultancy
Emsworth, W. Sussex
T: 01243 389911

Trinity Vet Centre
Maidstone, Kent
T: 01622 726730

Westpoint Veterinary Group
Warnham, West Sussex.
T: 01306 628086

White Horse Veterinary Surgery
Horsham, West Sussex
RH12 4HE T: 01403 252964

THE SOUTH WEST

Castle Vets
Bridgwater, Somerset.
T: 01278 459913
www.castleveterinarypractice.co.uk

Companion Care Veterinary Surgery
Bournemouth, Dorset
T: 01202 635160
www.ccbournemouth.co.uk

County Veterinary Clinic
Ilminster T: 01460 259509
www.countyvetclinic.co.uk

County Veterinary Clinic
Taunton T: 01823 326222
www.countyvetclinic.co.uk

Dalton's Game Consultancy
Amesbury, Wilts.
T: 01980 622350
www.gameconsultancy.co.uk

Filham Park Veterinary Clinic
Ivybridge, Devon
T: 01752 892700
www.filhamparkvets.co.uk

Ikin & Oxenham
Sidmouth, Devon
T: 01395 512611
Ottery St Mary, Devon
T: 01404 814322

JC Exotic Pet Consultancy
Salisbury, Wilts
T: 0777 5796432
www.jcexoticpetconsultancy.co.uk

The Minster Veterinary Practice
Howton, Hereford
Tel: 01981 341321
www.minstervets.co.uk

The Mount Veterinary Group
Honiton, Devon
T: 01404 841011
F: 01404 841014
M: 07850469595

Rosevean Veterinary Practice
Penzance, Cornwall
T: 01736 362215
info@roseveanvets.co.uk

Silva House Veterinary Group
Bath T: 01761 413341

St David's Poultry Team
Exmouth, Devon
T: 01392 872932

The Poultry Health Centre
Trowbridge, Wilts.
T: 07920 522594
www.poultryhealthcentre.com

Upton Veterinary Centre
Poole, Dorset
T: 01202 624140

Wareham Veterinary Centre
Wareham, Dorset
T: 01929 552599

THE WEST

Ashcroft Veterinary Surgery
Cirencester, Glos.
T: 01285 653683

Border Veterinary Centre
Oswestry, Shrops.
T: 01691 670395

MacArthur Barstow & Gibbs
Droitwich, Worcestershire
T: 01905 773262
F: 01905 796179
www.mbgvet.co.uk

Stow Veterinary Surgeons
Stow, Northleach & Bourton on the Water, Glos.
T: 01451 870566

WALES

Summerhill Veterinary Centre
Tariq Abou-Zahr
Newport, South Wales
T: 01633 255394

IRELAND

Eugene McGrath
Tralee, Co. Kerry
T: 066 7123098

Peninsula Veterinary Clinic
Kircubbin, Co Down
T: 028 4273 8700
Donaghadee, Co Down
T: 028 9188 2004

SCOTLAND

Academy Vet Centre
Stranraer, Wigtownshire
T: 01776 703131
www.academyvets.co.uk

Girling & Fraser
Perth T: 01738 635633
www.vetsinperth.com

Want to be included?

Send your details to: The Editor, *Practical Poultry Magazine*, Cudham Tithe Barn, Berry's Hill, Cudham, Kent TN16 3AG, or email to: pp.ed@kelsey.co.uk

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Foraging fowl

Chickens love to do it, but is it essential that back garden hens are allowed to free-range? We investigate the issue.

→ Brooding basics

How best to care for your newly-hatched chicks at a vital stage in their lives

→ Isolation unit

We explain the simplest way to make yourself one of these useful coops

PLUS: House bedding explained, The Gallery, Poultry Q&As, Breeders directory and more

* These are just some of the features planned for the next issue but circumstances outside our control may force last-minute changes. If this happens, we will substitute items of equal or greater interest.

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Your Q&As

Got a problem with your hens? Need some practical advice?

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Email pp.ed@kelsey.co.uk or write to Poultry Q&A, Practical Poultry, Kelsey Media, Cudham Tithe Barn, Berry's Hill, Cudham, Kent TN16 3AG

While it's possible to buy large feeders and drinkers to keep birds adequately supplied for a few days, leaving them unattended is always a risk and is best avoided.



Home alone hens

I've been invited to go away for Christmas and, while it's only for three days, I'm not sure what to do about my chickens. Any suggestions would be welcome.

SC, Wimborne, Dorset

When you have animals it can be difficult to take a break, especially at holiday times, but there are some things you can do to make going away and leaving your chickens for just a few days, possible.

The most important thing is your birds' security. If you can't call on a friend or neighbour to let them in and out, each day, then an automatic pop hole opener can be a great help. However, test it well in advance to make sure that the timings are set correctly, and that it's closing after all the birds have gone into the house.

Some versions are operated on a simple time switch while others make use of a light, sensor. Be careful if you choose the latter as we have heard of instances where they

open too early, letting the birds out as the fox is making its early-morning rounds. This, of course, shouldn't be a problem at this time of year, but keepers should take care during the light mornings of spring and summer.

The other obviously essential considerations are an adequate supply of both food and drinking water. There are many good feeders and drinkers on the market nowadays, capable of holding decent quantities of feed – up to 25kg – and water (up to 30 litres).

The size of the feeders and drinkers needed will depend on the number of birds kept. Try to judge how much the birds consume and multiply it by the number of days you're going to be absent. Once again, though, it will be helpful and reassuring if you can arrange for a neighbour or friend just to check that all is well on the days you're away. Understandably, though, this can be difficult to organise at Christmas.

Water is the most important factor; birds will survive for a few days without feed, but

a shortage of clean, fresh drinking water will rapidly affect them as they succumb to dehydration.

What's more, if the weather turns cold and the water in the drinker remains frozen for long periods of the day, this can induce the same effect. Under these circumstances you'll need to call on someone to deal with the situation (possibly twice a day) before the birds are too badly affected.

Don't be tempted to leave a drinker inside the hen house, as chickens don't drink at night so there's no need for such a measure. Also, the likelihood is that water will get spilt inside, wetting the bedding and creating a damp environment inside the house, which can lead to respiratory issues.

The bottom line is that all keepers of livestock (including chickens) have a duty of care to their animals, and must ensure the health and welfare of the animals they're responsible for. Leaving them unattended for any length of time is always best avoided.



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Shell colour makes no difference to the quality or taste of what's inside the egg.

I'm wondering if brown-shelled eggs are better and healthier to eat than white ones? You see both for sale in the shops, and I just wondered if there was any difference? I have to admit when I buy from the shop they are always brown eggs.
AD, Taunton, Somerset

The colour of an egg's shell makes no difference to its content or taste. It's simply an indication of the breed of bird, or its parent stock. In America, most eggs on sale in the shops are white.

In contrast, the UK market has traditionally tended to favour brown-shelled eggs; white ones have been tried

a number of times over the years, but have never proved popular enough with the buying public to make them a viable alternative in commercial terms.

The brown shells that sell so popularly here simply indicate that the hybrid hens laying most of them will have descended from the Rhode Island Red pure breed.

There are several hybrid breeds available now which are bred to supply coloured eggs, including white, tinted, pale blue, green, shades of brown and even slightly pink. These do look attractive when seen together, and reflect the growing public demand for something a bit different.

Mysterious losses

I've recently lost a couple of chickens and have no idea where they've disappeared to. I've seen a cat that climbs into the run, could this be the culprit? Would a cat be a threat to my chickens?
WB, Cheshire

WB, Cheshire

Although you can't completely rule out the chances of a cat attacking chickens, it's really very unlikely. Cats may be tempted to take chicks and very young birds, but adults are simply too large, strong and aggressive for a cat to handle. Most hens will give as good as they get when faced with a cat.

The most likely cause of the disappearances is a fox, and if a cat can

get to your birds, so can a fox. They are agile climbers and only need a small hole to get into a run.

The most important thing is to make the run as secure as possible; check for holes, gaps, signs of digging and any other weaknesses in the fencing, and deal with these as a matter of urgency.

The cold weather could encourage whatever's taking them to come back for easy pickings. The only other explanation would be theft or the birds escaping and either not finding their way home, or being attacked while they're wandering, but this will be solved by making the run more secure.

Disappearing eggs

I've noticed a serious drop in the number of eggs I get from my hens. I've never had this problem before and the feed is what they normally have.

I have noticed some eggshell in one of the nest boxes and that makes me think they could be eating their own eggs. If this is the problem, what can I do to stop this?
JF, Cambridge

Egg-eating can be a serious problem and one that's hard to stop once it becomes established behaviour. For this reason it really is important that it's caught early.

Hens learn from watching each other, and a habit that starts with one bird can spread through your flock. It's also almost impossible to find the culprit unless you catch them in the act.

The first course of action is to make sure you have enough nest boxes for the number of birds using the hen house. A hen entering a nest box already containing several eggs, risks breaking some with her feet. Even with several boxes available, you may find that your birds have a 'favourite' and 'fight' to use it, again causing breakages as they scuffle for space.

If you spot eggs that have been broken or chipped, remove them straight away, eliminating temptation for any egg-eaters among them. Fitting a loose-fitting, partial cover over the front of the nest boxes to make the inside as dark and private as possible, may also help. Use a piece of old sack or towelling, pinning it at the top so that it doesn't fully cover the opening and remains easy for the hens to push past as they go inside.

You could also try placing a few, false 'pot' eggs in the nest boxes. These are made of china or rubber, and resist when the birds peck at them. The idea is that the peckers quickly become disillusioned, which can help to break the habit.

If all else fails, a rollaway nestbox insert may be the only solution. These plastic devices are designed so that when the egg is laid, it rolls down a gentle slope to an area where it's covered and safe from any sort of damage. These are readily available and aren't terribly expensive either.



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Moulting worries

I have several birds that are moulting, but their new feathers don't seem to be growing properly. I've seen signs of blood on a few of my chickens which is a worry as I think there may be pecking going on.

Is there anything I can do to stop the birds from attacking each other?
TR, Yorkshire

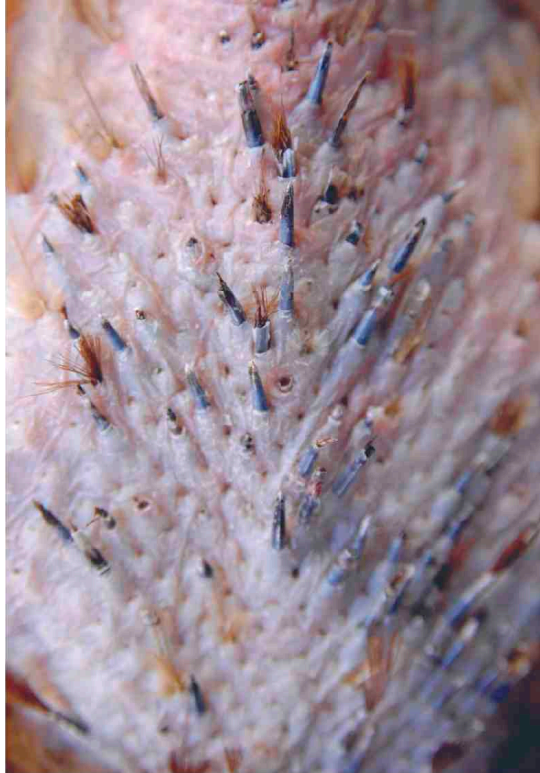
Although the moult is an annual occurrence, it still causes a lot of concern for many poultry keepers, especially those experiencing it with their birds for the first time. The birds' appearance becomes untidy and, in some cases, they can become almost bald.

The new feathers take time to come through fully and, as the quills regrow, they appear as little, blood-filled spikes. This is what can attract

a flockmate to peck and, if a lucky struck happens to draw blood, then that's when the trouble can start. The big risk is that other birds will join in, with potentially fatal results for the poor victim.

There are several options to help stop or prevent the problem; anti-peck sprays applied to the affected areas can work, and some keepers use beak clips. These work by preventing the beak from fully closing, so the bird can't grasp something as small as a feather, but can still feed. These should only be considered as a short-term solution, and should be removed as soon as any pecking risk has passed.

The best results, however, can be gained by separating the birds until the damaged feathers heal and the birds are ready to be reintroduced.



The point at which new feathers start coming through is when they're most vulnerable to pecking damage from frustrated or bored flock mates. Keep a wary eye on birds at this stage of their annual moult; remove and isolate any showing signs of bleeding without delay.

How much work?

I want to have some chickens but really only as pets, and a friend has offered me some brown hens that I think would be ideal. What I need to know is just how much care do pet chickens require?

TB, Doncaster, S Yorks.

Whatever the reason you keep chickens, they require the same care to keep them both healthy and in good condition. However, the good news is that they are much easier to look after than dogs; there's no walking, no twice-daily feeding, no baths and no grooming required!

Providing that they are suitably housed and have adequate space to roam during the day, they could be classed as 'low-maintenance' pets. As a guide, here's a summary of the kind of activity you should expect when looking after a few chickens in a back garden environment.

Daily jobs:

- Let your birds out into a secure run, as early as possible, and check for eggs.
- Poo-picking daily makes life a lot easier, and prolongs the life of the hen house bedding.
- Always watch the birds as they come out in the morning, checking for signs of distress, lethargy or injury.
- Fill and check all feed and water containers.
- Shut the birds back into a secure house at dusk, once again checking for any obvious signs of trouble.

Weekly jobs:

- Change the hen house bedding completely, brushing the house out. Dirty bedding makes great, free compost, so don't throw it away!
- Scrub out drinkers to remove any algae build-up and clean feeders.

Monthly jobs:

- Weather permitting, clean the house with an animal-specific disinfectant. These are readily available. Don't do this in cold, wet weather, as the house will need to be fully dry before the birds return to it.

- Inspect the house for signs of damage and wear and tear. Act before this gets too serious, and do it in the morning so you have time to make any repairs before dark.
- Check the security of gates and fencing around the chicken pen

Every three months:

- Thoroughly clean and disinfect of the hen house; remove all fittings, nest boxes, perches etc. Cleaning to this level is better carried out more often if possible.



'Little and often' is a good rule to work to when keeping hens at home. Well-managed birds shouldn't create too much work, but what you do have to do needs to be done properly and methodically.

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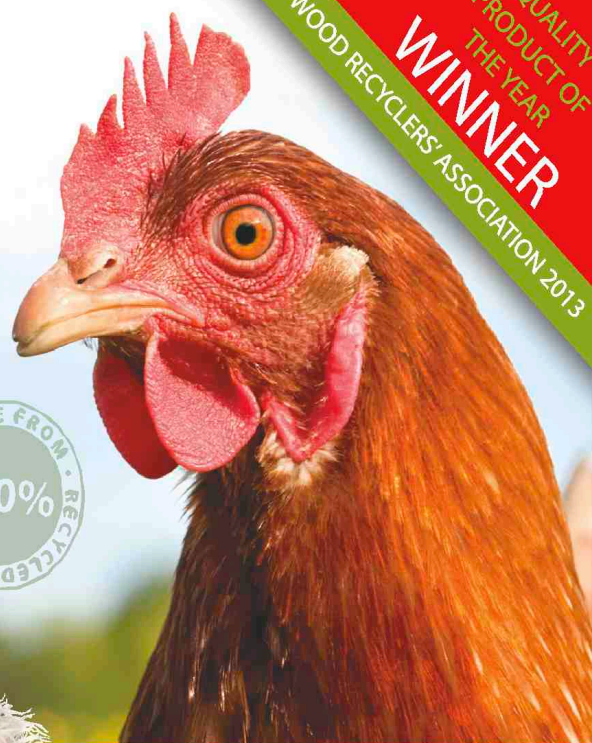
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Home improvements

Part 2 Alan Holtham

concludes the repairs and improvements needed on the down-at-heel, £50, secondhand hen house he bought recently.

The idea of this project was a simple one; to bring a sadly neglected and cheap hen house back into a usable condition. A few weeks ago, I was forced into buying a secondhand coop as I needed some emergency chicken accommodation and didn't have time to build anything myself.

Seeing what looked like a suitable unit advertised locally for just £50 seemed to tick all the boxes, so I snapped it up. It was obviously a cheap hen house that had probably originated from somewhere in the Far East. Nevertheless, I was confident that I'd be able to sort it out and bring it back to a usable condition without too much difficulty or expense.

However, what I hadn't bargained for was the red mite infestation that I found lurking in every corner of this structure. The mites were sheltering under the roofing felt, beneath the metal fittings and packed into just about every nook and cranny that I investigated. I was left scratching my head (and many other parts of my body) as I wrestled with the temptation of simply throwing the whole thing on to the bonfire!

But I persisted, stripping down the unit and treating the component parts very thoroughly to tackle the red mite, as I described last month. Then, having strengthened the side panels with diagonal corner braces and replaced the nest box floor with a secure plywood sheet, it was time to crack on with the roof panels and the rest of the work needed to get the house up and running once again.

It was obviously a cheap hen house that had probably originated from somewhere in the Far East.

► It seems like quite a lot of hen house for £50, but this secondhand coop was concealing a whole heap of trouble, literally!



▲ The felted nestbox lid had all the same problems as the main house roof, and was designed to hook under the end panel of the coop. But there was no way to secure it down against predators, although the previous owner had supplied a piece of broken paving slab to hold it in place!

► I replaced the original nest box lid with a piece of 15mm, exterior ply, and fitted a sturdy locking catch to keep it tightly secured.





The ventilation arrangements for the sleeping quarters were actually quite good, although no effort had been made to stop water dripping into the sliders and potentially rotting the side. It was already heavily watermarked and also infested with mite.



I made a new plywood baffle to replace the original, and fitted a larger top slider with a larger overhang to shed the water more effectively.



The sliding droppings tray inside the main house worked well but, once again, there was nothing to stop it being pushed up from underneath. To fix this I added a batten on either side to stop it lifting.



I also took the opportunity to give it a thorough disinfecting with Virkon, to minimise any bacterial issues from the previous inhabitants.



The house was fitted with a pair of perches but, at just 20x20mm in section, I felt these were far too small.



I replaced the inadequate perches with a single, 50x35mm perch, and rounded-off its top edges so that it would be comfortable for the birds to grip. The new perch was located in a pair of simple wooden brackets that, while holding it firmly in place, also left the perch easy to remove for cleaning.



The two doors closed up against some rather small and flimsy triangular plywood stops, so I replaced these with something more substantial, again with a view to increasing predator security and overall day-to-day durability.



The original, red mite-infested roof panel was replaced with a solid sheet of 12mm exterior ply, this time screwed up from underneath to avoid breaking the top surface and needlessly letting in water, as was the case before. I was able to re-use the edging strip to strengthen the edges and stop it sagging.

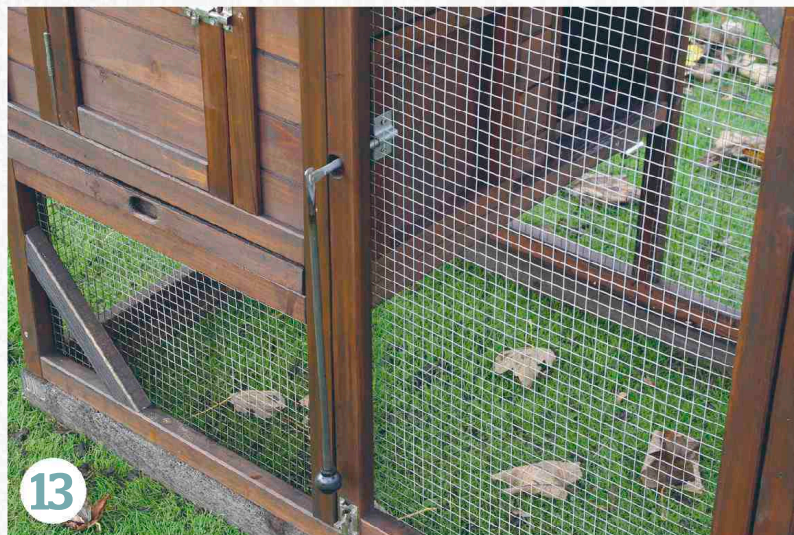




11: Although the ply is exterior grade and will withstand the weather, I do like to cover it as well, and have just discovered mini-profile Onduline. I think looks much neater than the bigger section version, but is obviously just as effective. However, I didn't fit this until everything had been treated with preservative.

12: I made a 50x50mm base using pressure-treated timber, so that the whole assembly could be screwed down on to this. As well as squaring everything up usefully, it also added some much needed strength to the structure, and raised the flimsy, bottom rails up and away from any rot-inducing dampness on the ground.

13: The handle used to operate the pophole slide had got lost somewhere, but I managed to fabricate a replacement from some spare rod that I found in my trusty 'scrap' box. All the other metal fittings seemed to be good enough to re-use after a thorough clean, though I did re-fit them with much bigger screws. The ramp up to the house was also missing, but this is just another piece of exterior ply fitted via a lift-off hinge so it can be removed quickly for moving.



◀ The finished job. While it certainly won't last a lifetime, I'm confident that it's now free from red mite and sufficiently sturdy to provide me with useful service for a number of years to come. Money and time well spent, I'd say!

So after a good day's work, and I guess at about £40-worth of materials, I've finished up with a half-decent chicken coop. It's not as strong as I would like, but at least it's now weatherproof, reasonably fox-proof and will provide the sound accommodation I need for two birds.

So, if you have one of these kinds of coop, or find yourself buying a neglected, secondhand unit as I did, I'd certainly recommend that you set about making the sort of simple changes and repairs outlined here.

It's not complicated to do, and this sort of affordable, remedial action will undoubtedly enhance both the strength and longevity of the house. However, do always consider carefully how many birds you try to fit inside units of this size. 🐔

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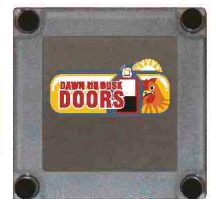
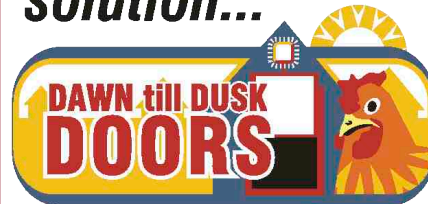


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01531 670439, Ledbury. Bantam: Wyandottes; blue laced, lavender & barred. Pekins, 12 colours. LF: French Wheaton, Copper Blue Marans, H/E to order & houses

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Pheasant Croft Poultry

01885 410594, Herefordshire. LF: Vorwerk, Cream Legbars, Green Legged Partridge Fowl. Bantam: Light Sussex, Buff Rocks, Marans, silver laced Wyandotte, buff laced Wyandotte. H/E & POL
www.pheasantcroftpoultry.com
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01295 721076 (after 6pm/weekends), Banbury. LF: Cuckoo & copper black Marans, Welsummer, Light & buff Sussex, lavender Araucana. Bantam: Pekins - lemon cuckoo, millefleur,

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01708 370120, Upminster, Essex. Bantam: black Naked Neck, lavender Araucana. LF: Welsummer, Vorwerk, salmon Faverolles, Cream Legbar, Ixworth

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01328 700957. LF: Brahma: lemon pyle, red pyle, gold & blue partridge, black, blue, darks, blue splash. Salmon Faverolles Bantam: Pekin; grey, mottled, porcelain, black, lemon. Barbu d'Uccle (millefleur) in buff. www.norfolkbrahmas.com

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07766 969294, Dunmow. Pekins in various colours available. Occasionally fertile eggs E: orchardviewbantams@hotmail.co.uk

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01206 262214/01787 468677, Colchester. Bantam: Wyandotte, Dutch, gold and silver Sebright

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01708 688257/07725 754719, Essex. LF: gold, dark Brahma, Welsummer. Bantam: Marans, Welsummer, Pekin (lavender, millefleur). Ducks: Saxony, Cayuga, Indian Runner. Birds & H/E, other breeds sometimes available

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07890 403675, Bucks. Cream Legbar, Croad Langshan, Friesian, Fayoumi, Lakenvelder, Marans cuckoo/French, Pendesence, RIR, RIR X LS, Spanish, Light Sussex, TNN, Welsummer. Bantam: Ancona, Araucana, Belgian, Leghorn, Marans, Pekin, Silkie, Light & speckled Sussex, Vorwerk. Eggs to adult E: clacy@gotadsl.co.uk

Cole Green Chickens

07768 444161, Herts. Bantam: Orpington; chocolate, gold laced, silver laced, chocolate cuckoo, cuckoo. Wyandotte; chocolate, lavender, buff laced, chocolate partridge, chocolate cream partridge. Pekin; lavender, red pile, millefleur, salmon, lemon cuckoo, white wheaten. LF: RIR & crested Cream Legbars. H/E, chicks & POL E: mickmaguire@fsmail.net

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01462 675767, Herts. Hybrids/P/breeds, shop open 7 days

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01722 782445, Salisbury. Bantam: Barbu d'Uccle

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01752 768478, Devon. Silver spangled Appenzellers, banded Plymouth Rock, Cream Legbars, RIR, Welsummer, silver duckwing Welsummer, buff Sussex, Burford Brown, Columbian Black Tail, Black Rock, French copper Marans. Saxony ducks ➔

BREEDER DIRECTORY

Moon Ridge Farm, Poultry Park

01392 851190/07891 329538, Exeter. POL hens, fully vaccinated, at least 9 breeds, year-round. Quail, Japanese, Italian & Golden Giants. Guinea fowl, peafowl, rhea, swans, domestic ducks, geese & waterfowl
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Kent Poultry

07824741109. H/E, large fowl laced & pencilled Wyandottes, buff Orpingtons, bantam Silkies, quail
www.kentpoultry.co.uk

Martins Wood

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The Old Gardens

0777 5670 819, Sidlesham, West Sussex. Rare breeds, poultry, bantams, including Silkies. Chicks. Turkeys, geese, ducks, quail. Pigeons. White Peace Dove hire for weddings or funerals. Closed on Tuesdays

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0780 3046109/ 01372 7267772, Chessington. Bantam: silver grey Dorking,

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SPR Centre

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www.surbitonpoultryandhenhouses.co.uk

Swedish Flower Chickens

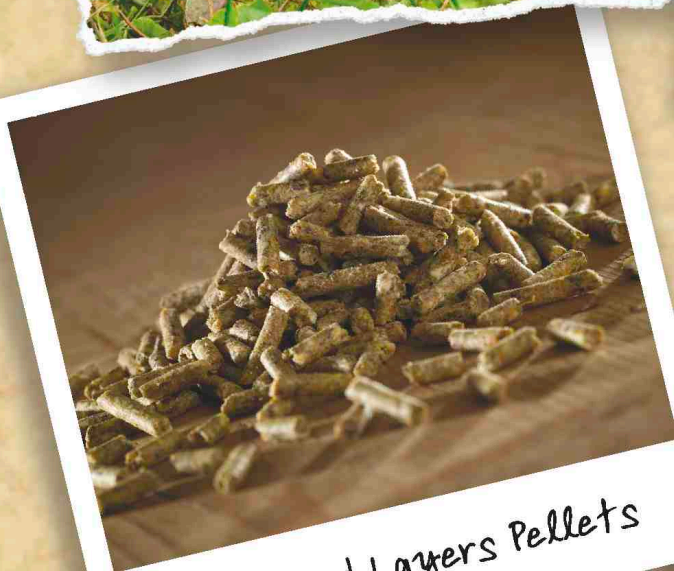
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Verm-X consists of herbs that have been used for centuries as a natural way to control intestinal hygiene

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Verm-X®

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